Our Quaker Way

The spiritual discipline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

**Draft edition for Yearly Meeting,
University of Hull and online
24-28 July 2027**

Yearly Meeting of Quakers in Britain

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Our Quaker Way: the spiritual discipline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain draft edition for presentation to Yearly Meeting 2027

The full text is also available on the Yearly Meeting website www.quaker.org.uk/oqw.

Book of Discipline Revision Committee
newbook@quaker.org.uk

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Our Quaker Way: Setting the scene

November 2026

Dear Friends,

We – your Book of Discipline Revision Committee – are led to offer you this first draft of our new book of discipline, for consideration at Yearly Meeting 24–28 July 2027.

Contents of *Setting the scene*

This *Setting the scene* document (which will not itself appear in the new book) gives information about:

- the background to the revision of the book of discipline,
- this first draft, and how and why we have been led to write it in this way,
- the 'Read, reflect, respond' programme which we hope you will participate in to support and prepare for the discernment that will happen at Yearly Meeting July 2027,
- some key questions for your consideration in responding to the draft,
- gaps in this first draft, and how to fill them,
- what we seek from Yearly Meeting July 2027 to guide any further work by the Committee on the draft book in order to bring a final version to a Yearly Meeting in 2030 for adoption.

Background

Yearly Meeting in 2018 agreed (Minute 31) to start revision of the book of discipline. The Meeting wanted a new book 'which can speak and be accessible to all present and future Quakers'. The book 'should draw on the richness of theological thought in our yearly meeting now and

historically, seeing diversity as fundamental to our community', and should use 'plain and simple' language. Yearly Meeting agreed that the revision should divide content between the core of the main book which sets out the **spiritual basis and principles of what we do and why**; and separate supplementary material giving **practical details on how we do things**. The Meeting asked for a Book of Discipline Revision Committee to be set up to do this work, and encouraged us to be 'prayerful, joyful, creative and bold'.

About this first draft

Following the above request from Yearly Meeting 2018, we felt called to write a completely new book for a new generation, not just an edited and updated version of the existing book of *Quaker faith & practice* which dates from the 1990s.

This first draft's working title is ***Our Quaker Way: the spiritual discipline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain***. We discerned this working title to seek to encapsulate in a few words the spiritual life, experience, faith and practice of our yearly meeting. The working title was deliberately chosen, among other reasons, to distinguish this draft from *Quaker faith & practice* which will continue in parallel until the new book of discipline is finally adopted. It will be for Yearly Meeting to discern the final title of the new book.

The first draft opens with an introduction to the whole of the new book, followed by six main parts:

- Our Quaker spirituality and worship (chapters 1 to 5) – covering worship, spiritual experience, theology, discernment and testimony
- Our Quaker community (chapters 6 to 18) – how our diverse and inclusive communities work - including 'church government' structures, processes and requirements (mainly in chapters 11 to 15)
- Our Quaker faith in action (chapters 19 to 25) – witness, testimony and sharing with others

- Our Quaker life journeys (chapters 26 to 28) – covering identity, belonging, love, loss, growth and change
- Our Quaker story (chapters 29 and 30) – our history and future
- Living as a Quaker – advices and queries.

This draft text is available in electronic and printed forms, with some chapters also in audio versions. Additional material, including a glossary, is available on the website.

We decided to delay writing chapter 18 on membership, as some aspects of membership are being considered by Yearly Meeting in session in 2026 and beyond. We are working on an initial draft of this chapter which we will offer to you as soon as possible.

As requested by Yearly Meeting 2018, this draft book focuses – particularly but not only in the 'church government' sections – on core text on the **spiritual basis of what we do and why**. It contains cross-references to supplementary material elsewhere (called '**Resources**' in the draft book) giving **practical details on how we do things**. We expect that reviewing existing and writing proposed new supplementary material will be done largely by other Britain Yearly Meeting committees and staff with expertise in relevant areas. We hope that further information about this, and suggested processes for approving and updating material, will be available before Yearly Meeting July 2027.

The draft text contains both narrative material written by the Book of Discipline Revision Committee and anthology quotations from Quaker writings past and present. Some of the content is drawn from passages included in *Quaker faith & practice*, including some familiar and well-loved quotations. Other content is new.

This draft text is mainly words. We intend that the final book will include colourful non-text content such as visual and other material. The present draft includes some illustrative examples of such possible content in Part G, which is currently only available online. Colour versions of the images published in this book can also be found in Part G.

Read, reflect and respond to the first draft text

We have worked with Woodbrooke and Quakers in Britain staff to provide a range of resources to help individual Friends, meetings and other groups through a programme of reading the draft text, reflecting on it, and responding to it. The resources include online materials and events, courses, in-person events, and support from local development workers and the Woodbrooke Where You Are opportunities. Information about the programme and resources is being sent to meetings.

We hope that many of you will read the whole draft cover-to-cover, but we understand that not everyone may be able to do so. If that isn't possible for you, below is a list of sample chapters – one from each part of the book – selected to give you a flavour of the draft and of how it differs from *Quaker faith & practice*:

- Chapter 3: Quaker theology
- Chapter 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities
- Chapter 22: Our peace testimony
- Chapter 26: Identity and belonging
- Chapter 29: Quaker history
- Part F: Living as a Quaker

You may also want to explore some of the church government chapters (11 to 15).

To further help you find your way through the book, we are creating a set of 'guided pathways' that follow other themes.

You will be able to download the guided pathways and send your responses on the Woodbrooke website from the rise of Yearly Meeting November 2026.

We look forward to receiving your responses to the draft in the period leading up to Yearly Meeting July 2027.

For further details on all of the above, go to www.woodbrooke.org.uk/rrr.

Key questions for your responses

We hope your responses will focus on broad-brush aspects of the draft, rather than detailed textual points. You might ask yourself key questions such as:

- What am I glad to see in the first draft text?
- Is my Quaker experience, and that of others and my Quaker community, reflected in the draft? Is there Quaker experience that is not reflected?
- How does the draft as a whole feel to me as a reader?
- Does anything stand out – either as jarring, or as most important?
- Is the draft good enough?
- What questions am I left with after reading the draft?

If you are led to offer detailed drafting comments and suggestions, you can do so via the Woodbrooke website above. We anticipate that such comments and suggestions will be collated for consideration by the Revision Committee as part of any further work in the light of broad guidance from Yearly Meeting July 2027, rather than be examined in detail in that Yearly Meeting's sessions.

Gaps in the first draft text and how to fill them

Despite our best efforts, we are aware of some gaps in content (for example, the experiences of black, brown and Friends of colour) that limit the reflection of the full diversity of our community. We would welcome, as part of your responses, suggested material – including anthology quotations – to fill any gaps you identify and to increase the diversity of personal experiences and perspectives across Quakers in Britain within the book. You can also send material via the suggestions form that can be found on www.quaker.org.uk/newbook.

Yearly Meeting in July 2027 and beyond

We will be asking Yearly Meeting in July 2027 to discern, and give minuted guidance, in broad terms on these questions:

- Is the draft on broadly the right lines?
- Are its tone, style and use of language appropriate, accessible and inclusive?
- Is the balance right between the narrative text written by the revision committee and anthology quotations from Quaker writings past and present?
- What further work needs to be done to prepare a final version of the book itself?

We stand ready to do such further work. We would anticipate sharing a revised version with you during 2029, so that a Yearly Meeting in 2030 can be ready to approve the new book of discipline for publication – in print, in a variety of digital formats and platforms, and possibly in audio and visual form.

We offer you this draft text as our ministry with our love. In Friendship,

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

Rosie Carnall, Catherine Brewer and Michael Phipps (clerking team)

Michael S Booth (secretary)

together with currently 23 other members of the Committee coming from over 20 area meetings.

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Introduction

0.01 Welcome to *Our Quaker Way*, the book of discipline of Quakers in Britain. The purpose of this book is to express who we are as a Quaker community and our shared understanding of the Quaker way. The traditional name 'book of discipline' does not imply something imposed on us. It is our collective self-discipline to discern and follow what love requires of us, even when it is challenging.

> [*Our Quaker Way*] expresses what is most important in our shared life, which we could see as a testimony to the grace of God as shown in the lived experience of the Britain Yearly Meeting community.
>
> Book of Discipline Revision Committee, 2019

To become our book of discipline, *Our Quaker Way* has been considered and accepted by Britain Yearly Meeting in session, a gathering that any Quaker in Britain can attend and where everyone present takes part in decision-making. The contents of this book have therefore been discerned, tested and found helpful by the whole community. This is what the Light is showing us at the moment. This book is for our comfort and our discomfort: for support and assurance as well as spiritual challenge.

This Introduction describes the nature of Quaker spirituality and how it informs the approaches taken to different topics in this book. It explains some of the ways the book can be used, and how religious and spiritual language is used throughout.

Our Quaker spirituality

0.02 As Quakers, our life together grows from our shared experience of what the Light has revealed to us:

- We all have direct access to God, and this can transform us.

- We live under divine guidance, as individuals and communities.
- We seek to address that of God in everyone.
- The Spirit is active and continues to reveal new light.
- The whole of life is sacred. We don't separate religion from daily life.

These insights can be expressed in many ways, but the experience that underlies them is the basis of our Quaker faith. Our testimony and all our practices grow from these roots.

Quakers have very varied ways of expressing our spirituality and we celebrate this rich diversity within our community:

> Differences of religious belief and language are inevitable within the Quaker community. They reflect the important differences in our personal histories, spiritual experience, cultural backgrounds, and religious inheritance.
>
> These differences can be enriching, because they enable us to discover other perspectives on spiritual reality, which is always greater than any single formulation of belief.
>
> Helen Rowlands, 2017

0.03 This book aims to reflect the range of views among British Quakers, a range that is richer and more subtle than simple labels such as 'religious', 'agnostic' or 'nontheist'. To balance representation, simplicity and telling the truth about our tradition, the text variously uses the terms 'God', 'Light', 'Spirit', and 'the Divine'. These are just some of the many words that could be used to describe what we encounter in worship. As a reader, you are invited to understand these words in ways that make sense to you, hopefully inspired by the many possibilities already present within the Quaker community.

Using the book

0.04 This book collects information, guidance, experiences, and wisdom together in one place. This makes these resources easy to find and share, and it reminds us why we continue to treasure our previous books of discipline.

The language in quotations reflects the time when they were written, which may mean they use words that are different from the ones we would use today. Quotations in both English and Welsh are included, as these are the languages most used by Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting.

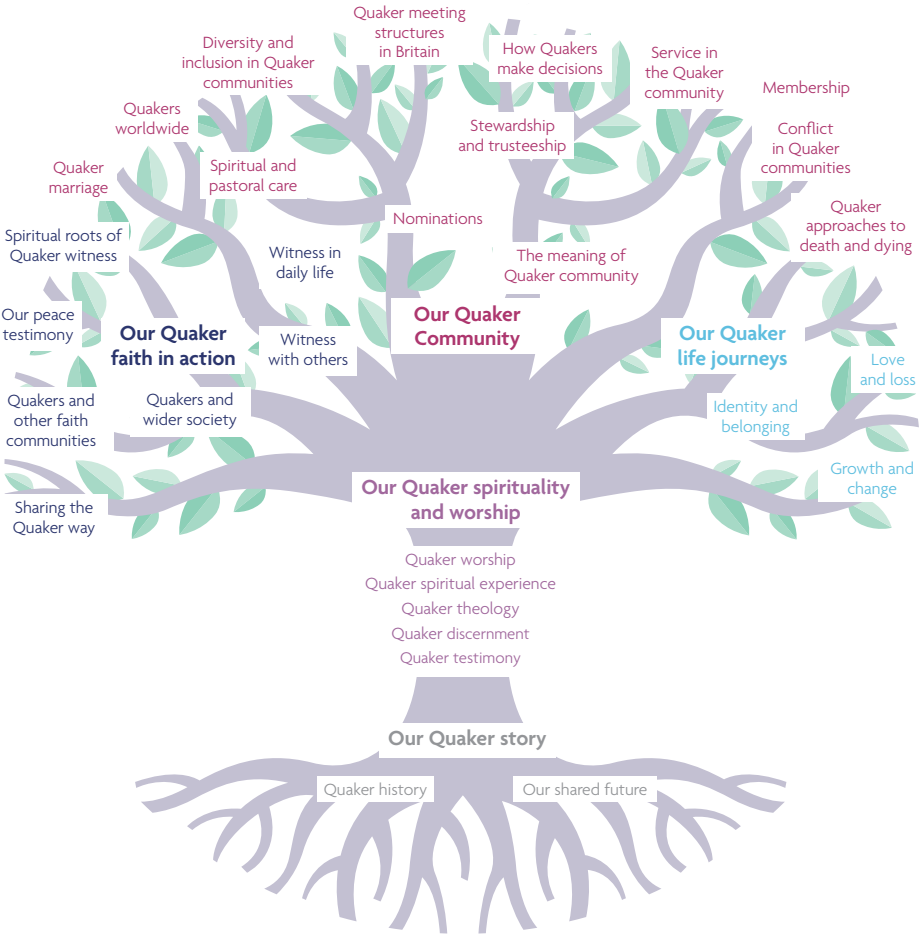
This book outlines our core principles as part of our ongoing journey together, both rooted in our tradition and open to new light. The detail of how we apply these principles may change more frequently than this book. So, for some topics, up-to-date information is available as extra resources, and the book notes where this is the case. Some parts of the book explain structures and processes based on our spiritual insights, as well as practices agreed on by Quakers in Britain or required by law. Others describe the personal experiences and reflections of Quakers throughout our history.

You can use this book in different ways depending on what you need:

- Use the contents list and index (and the keyword search in the online version) to find a specific topic or quotation.
- Browse through a section to see what speaks to you today.
- Read the book from beginning to end to get an overview of the modern British Quaker tradition.

The diagram shows how the book is divided into six parts: *A: Our Quaker spirituality and worship*, *B: Our Quaker community*, *C: Our Quaker faith in action*, *D: Our Quaker life journeys*, *E: Our Quaker story*, and *F: Living as a Quaker*. Each part is divided into chapters, represented as the branches of the tree.

Living as a Quaker:
Advices & queries for Quakers in Britain



Old and new wisdom

0.05 Our story is one of faithfulness to a way that depends on words yet reaches beyond them, commits us to a shared path, and is rooted in a strong centre. We hold a living tradition that brings together old and new wisdom. As we continue to weave tradition with innovation, we seek to live our faith creatively throughout the lifetime of this book of discipline. We are reminded that:

> Our history as a Religious Society is a history of exploration, experimentation and brave attempts producing some spectacular successes and some, occasionally dangerous but usually just forgettable, mistakes. I am convinced that this process of exploration and discovery is vitally important for the health of our Society. Stagnation tends to produce spiritual atrophy, what we thrive on is a continual seeking, waiting, expecting; a process of looking outwards to the world. But this process will just lead to disintegration unless there is a solid centre, a core of tradition that provides a standard by which to evaluate each new endeavour, each exciting venture into the unknown. When we can hold tradition and innovation in a dynamic tension and reach out from a solid base we begin to catch glimpses of the realm of God.
>
> Robert Halliday, 1991

0.06 Above all, we are called to listen to the Spirit beyond the words. As the elders at Balby wrote in 1656:

> Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter; for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.
>
> From the postscript to the letter from the meeting of elders at Balby, 1656

Part A:

Our Quaker spirituality and worship

Introduction

A.01 Worship is central to the Quaker way. In worship, we can experience a divine power that draws us together, guides us and transforms us. Throughout our history, Friends have experienced and described this divine reality in many ways. The diversity of belief and language among Quakers today invites us to listen more deeply to understand each other's spiritual journeys.

As we discern together, we can discover how we are led to live in right relationship with the earth and its people. This is our Quaker testimony, which we are called to live out and share with others.

A.02 The chapters in this part of the book explore different aspects of Quaker spirituality and worship.

Chapter 1 – Quaker worship explains our practice of meeting for worship, including the collective self-discipline needed for silent worship and vocal ministry. It describes online and blended meetings, children's meetings and afterwords, and Friends' experiences of the power of a gathered meeting.

Chapter 2 – Quaker spiritual experience shares a wide range of spiritual experiences from Friends throughout our history. These include experiences of encounter, transformation, connection, and creativity, as well as spiritual dryness and suffering. It also shares Friends' reflections on prayer, spirituality in daily life and spiritual friendship.

Chapter 3 – Quaker theology explores the many ways that Friends understand and express our spiritual experience today. It describes the foundational Quaker relationship to Christianity, our different understandings of God, and the diversity of religious language that Friends use.

Chapter 4 – Quaker discernment describes our spirituality of responding to divine guidance and Quaker practices for testing leadings in community, including meetings for clearness. It explains our understanding of a Quaker concern, and how we test and recognise a concern as a divine call to action.

Chapter 5 – Quaker testimony describes how, as Friends, we are called to share our vision of wholeness and peace for the world. It explores how our understanding of testimony has changed over time and continues to evolve, as we respond to new insights and leadings.

Chapter 1:

Quaker worship

1.01 Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was.

George Fox, 1657

Introduction

1.02 Worship is the heart of the Quaker way and it is central to our lives as Quakers. The word 'worship' can refer to our individual response to an encounter with the Light. It can also mean the Quaker practice of stilling and centring oneself to experience this connection. For Quakers, it is most often used in the context of 'meeting for worship', which includes both of these meanings.

This chapter focuses on worship as a shared experience. It includes:

- What worship is
- Diverse perspectives
- Preparing for worship
- Meetings for worship
- Online and blended meetings for worship
- Settling into worship
- Vocal ministry
- Afterwords
- Children in meeting

- Semi-programmed worship
- A gathered meeting

For more on individual spiritual practice, see 2: Quaker spiritual experience.

What worship is

1.03 When we set aside the chatter of thoughts and busyness of daily life, simply resting in stillness can restore our hearts and minds. However, as we listen inwardly, we may experience a connection with something beyond ourselves.

1.04 Gradually, if we persist in the quiet, in the exploration of inner space, the strains may fall away, and we become aware of something which we may recognise as a sense of the presence of God, or to which we may give another name, but which is at the time, somehow alive with a silent word for us.

Christopher Holdsworth, 1985

1.05 Outward silence is physical, but here is a deep inner silence. This is not just an absence of thoughts, but a peaceful inner stillness with a positive quality that we can almost feel. It is an internal condition where in the stillness of the mind we are separated from the everyday busyness of our lives. As the clamour of our incessant thoughts subsides, we find a deep peace. There is no striving. Here we just 'are', no longer occupied with cares and desires, wishes or dreams. Here, time has no power as we are held in timeless space, in a moment of eternity in which love and peace permeate our whole being. This is not just a comfortable feeling but deep inner peace that cannot be adequately described. It is a peace that we know is God. In this emptiness from preoccupation with self we have the freedom to turn to him unhindered.

Curt Gardner, 2012

1.06 Outward silence is not the most important or necessary aspect of worship. The silence we seek is inward, a way of opening to an inner awareness that is beyond words:

> [The early Friends] made the discovery that silence is one of the best preparations for communion [with God] and for the reception of inspiration and guidance. Silence itself, of course, has no magic. It may be just sheer emptiness, absence of words or noise or music. It may be an occasion for slumber, or it may be a dead form. But it may be an intensified pause, a vitalised hush, a creative quiet, an actual moment of mutual and reciprocal correspondence with God.
>
> Rufus Jones, 1937

1.07 Early Quakers discovered the power of expectant waiting as a group. This experience grew into a shared practice of 'waiting in the Light' for God to speak to them and lead them. This is the origin of meeting for worship.

1.08 Therefore, dear Friends, wait in the Light, that the Word of the Lord may dwell plentifully in you.

William Dewsbury, 1675

1.09 For when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up.

Robert Barclay, 1678

1.10 Quaker worship is more than solitary meditation or an individual encounter with the Light: it is a shared experience. In Quaker worship we meet with the Light and with each other.

1.11 It's easy to be alone and think for yourself and gather your own thoughts in silence, but it's even more powerful to be together in silence and to feel linked with others.

Participant in Junior Yearly Meeting, 2015

1.12 True worship may be experienced at any time; in any place – alone on the hills or in the busy daily life – we may find God, in whom we live and move and have our being. But this individual experience is not sufficient, and in a meeting held in the Spirit there is a giving and receiving between its members, one helping another with or without words. So there may come a wider vision and a deeper experience.

London Yearly Meeting, 1925, amended 1994

1.13 People who have entered the room as individuals sooner or later become aware that they are encountering others present at a level deeper than normal conscious communication. While they remain fully themselves they also become, in a real sense, one group; a communion of people bonded together in spirit.

George Gorman, 1973

1.14 As the meeting gathers, I believe that a subtle energy begins to work among us. That of God in each of us is meeting the Divine.

Anonymous, Quaker Quest, 2004

1.15 Worshippers are like the spokes of a wheel. The nearer they come to the centre of all Life the nearer they are to each other. Having reached the centre they become united in a single life through the creative love of God.

Howard H Brinton, 1931

1.16 In worship we have our neighbours to right and left, before and behind, yet the Eternal Presence is over all and beneath all. Worship does not consist in achieving a mental state of concentrated isolation from one's fellows. But in the depth of common worship it is as if we found our separate lives were all one life, within whom we live and move and have our being.

Thomas R Kelly, 1938

1.17 It is about being, being still, being with others intent on being, being together. It is about being open to the spirit that is present within each individual and present within the group.

Judith Jenner, 2017

Diverse perspectives

1.18 Our Quaker community embraces a diversity of perspectives on the profound experiences we share in meeting for worship.

Not everyone will use the language of 'the Light' or the word 'worship' to describe their own experience. Despite our different understandings, in a meeting for worship, each of us can become part of a shared encounter with something beyond words.

The following passages provide three different perspectives on the rich diversity within our meetings, and illustrate some of the range of language that Friends use to describe this experience.

1.19 The treasure I had found [in meeting for worship] seemed startlingly simple, and I held this treasure quietly to myself, exploring its significance, feeling it almost too good to be true. Part of its simplicity was that I and others were to start just where we were at the moment and proceed at our own pace from there. How blessed that there were no restraints of belief. The promptings of love and truth were the starting places, and we could move at our own pace to recognise them as the leadings of God – the beyond which drew me and others on from our limitations and despairs and smallnesses.

Ruth Fawell, 1987

1.20 I come to Meeting for Worship to worship. But what does it mean? Each of us has a different view. I feel it as something linked to being alive, and the miracle of self-consciousness. Life – being – is a mystery, beyond and in a different register to the plain facts of chemistry and molecular biology... Seen as a gift, it points to

the idea of Grace. Being Quaker allows me to express my dizzy dumbfoundedness, and the sense of gratitude for this mystery. By sharing this mystery with others in the silence of a Quaker Meeting, I become clearer. We can each find our own words, on the edge of language.

Neil Morgan, 2022

1.21 We came together to know the life-changing, earth-shaking power that early Friends had encountered, and to ask what it means for us to be a people gathered anew by that power. Friends came with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and concerns. Opening the gathering to Friends from all over the world meant that we could not rely on existing relationships of trust and support. We were not all on the same page. Patience, openness, and care were needed to keep us together, in a unity that goes deeper than agreement. At times, our differences could have divided us. Yet with God's grace, we were helped to continue to travel together, to lift each other up with care and tenderness, to turn each other to the Light. Our experience of being drawn together, in full view of the challenges of community, showed us the unifying power of the Presence in the Midst. When our differences became clear, Christ yoked us together.

Jordans Young Adult Friends Gathering, 2024

For more on the diversity of Quaker religious language, see 3: Quaker theology.

Preparing for worship

1.22 Come to meeting for worship with heart and mind prepared.

Deuwch i'r cyfarfod addoli wedi ymbaratoi yn eich calon a'ch meddwl.

Advices & queries / Cynghorion a holiadau 9, 1994

1.23 We are each encouraged to have a regular practice that allows us to strengthen our inward connection to the Light:

> A ydych yn ceisio neilltuo adegau o dawelwch i fod yn agored i'r Ysbryd Glân? Y mae ar bob un ohonom angen canfod ffordd i mewn i ddistawrwydd sy'n ein galluogi i ddyfnhau'n hymwybyddiaeth o'r dwyfol ac i ganfod tarddle mewnol ein nerth. Ceisiwch lonyddwch mewnol, hyd yn oed ynghanol gweithgareddau bywyd beunyddiol.
>
> Do you try to set aside times of quiet for openness to the Holy Spirit? All of us need to find a way into silence which allows us to deepen our awareness of the divine and to find the inward source of our strength. Seek to know an inward stillness, even amid the activities of daily life.

*Cynghorion a holi*adau / *Advices & queries* 3, 1994

1.24 As well as grounding our own spiritual life, our individual practice will contribute to the depth of worship when we meet together, and to the life of our Quaker community. This preparation may be different for each of us:

> We are so often busy in the body; there are places to be, people to see, tasks that require our attention at every moment we try to set aside. Making the space to 'come with heart and mind prepared' does not always look like stillness as I once imagined.
>
> As a child, I was silent through meeting for worship. Unlike my brother, who seemed to want to wrestle every surface or hand extended to him, I sat in my parent's lap, on the floor, or on a friend's lap. Was I prepared? Had I contemplated a query or centred my thoughts? The intellectual definition we assign this activity does not allow for a child, or perhaps any nonintellectual, to prepare. I trust in my wise child self – that I indeed had 'heart and mind prepared', as did my brother. Or perhaps I had body prepared? A child's body is always prepared for its journey of worshipful discovery.

Jaya Karsemeyer, 2010

1.25 Even when we feel unprepared, a meeting for worship may help us in unexpected ways:

> There are times of dryness in our individual lives, when meeting may seem difficult or even worthless. At such times one may be tempted not to go to meeting, but it may be better to go, prepared to offer as our contribution to the worship simply a sense of need. In such a meeting one may not at the time realise what one has gained, but one will nevertheless come away helped.
>
> Berks & Oxon Quarterly Meeting Ministry & Extension Committee, 1948

Meetings for worship

1.26 A meeting for worship can happen in many different circumstances. When Quakers come together, as part of a formal meeting or informal gathering, we often begin and end with worship.

When we speak simply of 'meeting for worship', we usually mean the regular (often weekly) meeting held by most Quaker communities. However, there are also other Quaker meetings for a specific purpose, which share the same spirit and intention of worship. These include meetings for worship for business (see *chapter 8: How Quakers make decisions*), marriage (see *chapter 14: Quaker marriage*) and meetings to remember Friends who have died (see *chapter 15: Quaker approaches to death and dying*). Worship may also be part of our social witness – for example, at a vigil for peace or at a social justice or climate action (see *chapter 21: Witness with others*).

The regular meeting for worship is a public act of worship that is open to everyone, whether or not they are already part of the community.

1.27 Meeting for worship can be held at any time and in any place. No time or place is more sacred than another.

For practical purposes, most meetings will have a regular time and place for worship. The place may be a Quaker meeting house, a rented space

or someone's home. Meetings for worship can also take place outside or online. Our meeting spaces are often plain, reflecting our testimony of simplicity.

1.28 Lying upon a mound of rocks in a field somewhere near Yealand. Looking at the sky in total silence created an atmosphere of stillness and peace. It was the only meeting I have ever done outside and this made the silence seem so much more pure. The meeting halls of Bootham and Brigflatts may be beautiful but they were beaten by the beauty of having nothing. The darkness cast a spell over the meeting and closed the world in, making our togetherness feel absolute.

Felix Charteris, 2016

1.29 We prepare a space in which we can face one another in worship, and the meeting begins when the first person settles into stillness.

Normally, one or two people will be appointed as elders, with responsibility for helping the meeting keep to the spirit of Quaker practice. However, everyone present shares responsibility for the conduct of the meeting. Elders will usually end the meeting by shaking hands.

To be true to our understanding of the Light within every person, we should make our worship accessible to all who wish to attend, including families and children. This topic is addressed in more detail in *chapter 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities*.

For more on eldership, see 10: Spiritual and pastoral care. For guidance on holding meetings for worship, see the Resources.

Online and blended meetings for worship

1.30 One way to increase the accessibility of worship is through online meetings for worship, or 'blended' meetings, in which people physically gathered in a single location are joined by others online.

People may join online worship for many different reasons. Those who are unable to travel can be included online, and some find this method of worship enhances their experience. However, others find screens and technology a distraction or barrier to worship. There are also concerns that reliance on online worship may increase isolation and exclusion for some, even while it is more accessible for others.

Meeting for worship is not simply an event that we attend as individuals: it is embedded in and expresses the life of a Quaker community. The needs of the community and the importance of inclusivity should inform our decisions about whether single-location, online or blended meetings are appropriate at any given time.

The following extracts give contrasting perspectives on online worship.

1.31 Pan symudom ni o Gymru i Singapore ddwy flynedd yn ôl, a minnau'n hiraethu am gymuned, am ffrindiau, am yr hyn sy'n gyfarwydd, am gael perthyn, des i at y Crynwyr. Erbyn hyn rwy'n mynychu dau gyfarfod gwahanol iawn...

Yn Singapore rydym yn ymgynnull mewn llyfrgell gymunedol, gan eistedd gyda'n gilydd mewn cylch ac ymdawelu. Gan nad oes waliau i'r llyfrgell ar bob ochr, gallwn deimlo natur yn byrlymu o'n cwmpas: awel gyson yn y gwres trofannol, trydar yr adar, siffrwd y coed, mellt yn ystod y monsŵn. Mae technoleg yn galluogi Cyfeillion eraill o India ac o Malaysia i ymuno â ni ar-lein. Yn y cylch mae Ffrindiau o draddodiadau amrywiol wedi fy ymgeleddu ac, er fy mod ymhell oddi cartref, nid wyf yn teimlo'n estron.

Rwyf hefyd yn dihuno yn y nos i fynychu cyfarfodydd y Crynwyr Cymraeg ar-lein yng Nghymru. Er na all geiriau'n unig adrodd fy nhaith ysbrydol, na mynegi'n iawn fy mhrofiad o Dduw, Cymraeg yw iaith fy ysbryd. Ar y sgrin yn y cwrdd Cymraeg, teimlaf fod gennyf wreiddiau dwfn, a chlymau na all pellter nac amser eu datod.

Mae'r ddau gwrdd yn wahanol iawn: y naill yng ngwres y dydd, ym mwrlwm y llyfrgell; y llall yn yr ystafell ddistaw pan fydd Singapore

yn cysgu o'm cwmpas. Maent ill dau yn caniatáu i mi siarad â Duw, a hynny yn fy ffordd fy hun, ymhlith ffrindiau.

When we moved from Wales to Singapore two years ago, and I was longing for community, for friends, for what is familiar, for a sense of belonging, I came to the Quakers. I now attend two very different meetings...

In Singapore we gather in a community library, sit together in a circle and allow silence to fall. As the library is not fully enclosed, nature pulses all around us: a constant breeze in the tropical heat, the song of birds, the rustling of trees, lightning in the monsoon season. Technology allows Friends from India and Malaysia to join us online. In the circle, Friends from many different traditions have welcomed me, and although I am far from home, I do not feel like a stranger.

I also wake in the night to attend online Welsh language Quaker meetings in Wales. Though words alone cannot recount my spiritual journey, nor fully express my experience of God, Welsh is the language of my spirit. On the screen in the Welsh meeting, I feel that I have deep roots, and bonds that neither distance nor time can sever.

The two meetings are very different: one in the sweltering mid-morning heat, in the busy library; the other in the quiet space, while all of Singapore is sound asleep. Both allow me to speak to God, in my own way, among friends.

Anna Loh, 2025

1.32 Coming together online is a simpler and in some ways purer communion than meeting in physical space; it brings us quickly to essentials. Many participants express appreciation for the contact with a wider variety of Friends than they find locally or even nationally, and some say they feel able to share more freely than they do in person... Online, we settle quickly and

easily. We get closer to each other's faces than we would if we were together in person, and when we're moved to show each other something, we may even virtually tour each other's homes. Ironically, meeting from a distance brings us closer together. Far from being a temporary stopgap, videoconferencing is testimony to the fact that Friends' practice is dependable always and everywhere.

Ann Jerome, 2023

1.33 At some point, we will need to grapple with some of the trade-offs we have accepted by choosing to add a technological bridge to our worship. When will Friends who would have preferred a ride to meeting be less likely to ask for the ride, because they know they can join from their laptops? When might we inadvertently add to Friends' isolation, rather than mitigating it, by making it so easy to join remotely? What is lost when we lose the casual interactions on the way into the meetinghouse, as we wait for the bathroom, and as we help jump a car with a dead battery? What might it mean over time for Friends meetings to have 'competition' from so many other meetings around the world? What will it mean when Friends move around the world but choose to remain part of their Quaker communities from their former homes, rather than acclimating to new meetings in their new locations? In a world where so much of our time is spent in front of screens, and so many of our relationships end up happening within the four walls of our Zoom squares, Friends may have a calling to continue to testify to the importance of simple, plain, in-person worship. Many people in our world are hungry for the chance to escape their online lives and just be together. Friends have had the honor of caring for this practice for hundreds of years, and it's not time to fully lay it down, nor totally replace it, yet.

Helen Berkeley, 2023

For guidance on holding online and blended meetings, see the Resources.

Settling into worship

1.34 The experience of meeting for worship varies from person to person and from meeting to meeting. Sometimes it may feel easy to settle into worship. At other times it may be a continual struggle against distraction.

1.35 The first that enters into the place of your meeting... turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light... Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the spirit, are come nearer to the Lord than words are; for God is a spirit, and in the spirit is he worshipped... In such a meeting there will be an unwillingness to part asunder, being ready to say in yourselves, it is good to be here: and this is the end of all words and writings to bring people to the eternal living Word.

Alexander Parker, 1660

1.36 Writing in the seventeenth century, William Penn encouraged us to set aside our own thoughts and attend to the Light Within, as shown in the following quotations.

1.37 When you come into your meetings, both preachers and people, what do you do? Do you gather bodily only and kindle a fire, compassing yourselves about with the sparks of your own kindling, and so please yourselves and walk in the light of your own fire and the sparks which you have kindled, as those did in the time of old whose portion was to lie down in sorrow?

Or, rather, do you sit down in true silence, resting from your own will and workings, and waiting upon the Lord, with your minds fixed in that Light wherewith Christ has enlightened you, until the

Lord breathes life in you, refresheth you and prepares you and your spirits and souls to make you fit for His service, that you may offer unto Him a pure and spiritual sacrifice?

William Penn, 1677

1.38 Love silence, even in the mind... Much speaking, as much thinking, spends, and in many thoughts, as well as words, there is sin. True silence is the rest of the mind; and is to the spirit, what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.

William Penn, 1699

1.39 In the following extracts, Friends describe their own experiences of settling into worship.

1.40 I began to get still. But I had no sooner commenced than a perfect pandemonium of voices reached my ears, a thousand clamouring notes from without and within, until I could hear nothing but their noise and din. Some of them were my own voice, some were my own questions, some of them were my very prayers. Others were the suggestions of the tempter, and the voices of the world's turmoil. Never before did there seem so many things to be done, to be said, to be thought; and in every direction I was pushed and pulled, and greeted with noisy acclamations of unspeakable unrest. It seemed necessary for me to listen to some of them, and to answer some of them, but God said, 'Be still, and know that I am God'. Then came the conflict of thoughts for the morrow, and its duties and cares; but God said 'Be still'. And as I listened, and slowly learned to obey, and shut my ears to every sound, I found, after a while, that when the other voices ceased, or I ceased to hear them, there was a still, small voice in the depths of my being that began to speak with an inexpressible tenderness, power and comfort.

Anonymous, *c.*1900

1.41 When I sit down I immediately start to focus on things that have been on my mind – mostly trivial little tasks or worries – and then mentally peel them away, like the layers of an onion, and push them away from me, until I reach a space that is empty and quiet. At that point, I begin to 'hear' the silence and feel the stillness, and then I wait to see what will happen. It doesn't always work.

Anonymous, 2011

1.42 As I silence myself I become more sensitive to the sounds around me, and I do not block them out. The songs of the birds, the rustle of the wind, children in the playground, the roar of an airplane overhead are all taken into my worship. I regulate my breathing as taught me by my Zen friends, and through this exercise I feel the flow of life within me from my toes right through my whole body. I think of myself like the tree planted by the 'rivers of water' in Psalm 1, sucking up God's gift of life and being restored. Sometimes I come to meeting for worship tired and weary, and I hear the words of Jesus, 'Come unto me, all that labour and are weary, and I will give you rest'. And having laid down my burden, I feel refreshed both physically and spiritually. This leads me on to whole-hearted adoration and thanksgiving for all God's blessings. My own name, Tayeko, means 'child of many blessings' and God has surely poured them upon me. My heart overflows with a desire to give him something in return. I have nothing to give but my own being, and I offer him my thoughts, words and actions of each day, and whisper 'Please take me as I am'.

Tayeko Yamanouchi, 1979

1.43 Silence is my great easing from the pressures and busyness of the week. I feel as if I can just throw all my problems into the centre of the Meeting with a 'There, you deal with them.' Let me be free! Let me swing in this hammock of release! Birds outside prompt me into prayers of thankfulness for beauty and wonder in the world, for blessings in my life, for family and friends, and the good things

I've enjoyed this week. This act of gratitude opens me. I expand into it and feel a healing of Spirit. It leads me to pray for those close to me who are troubled, or others I've seen on the news and been disturbed by. Then my own needs inevitably swim to the surface. The power of the stillness works at them.

Anonymous, 2009

1.44 Here, in the silence, you experience a profound sense of oneness within yourself and with others. It is as though you step off the stage and drama of life and into a very different dimension altogether.

This temporary stepping off the stage of the world and into the cool stillness of meeting for worship has a timeless quality all of its own. For it is here that you put aside your identity as a father, teacher, writer… and simply drift without the 'oars' of methods or creeds upon an ocean that carries you to the divine within.

Christopher Goodchild, 2017

1.45 My two greatest struggles are with sleep and the laying down of my discursive, argumentative, perhaps masculine self, to accept a time of non-self and non-striving. I used to feel that this was a pointless activity, with no practical outcomes; now I trust that just as bodily sleep allows our dream-world to help in the assimilation and ordering of the psychic experiences of the day, so this free-flowing state of letting go, of being held between consciousness and unconsciousness, 'swinging in the divine hammock', allows a healing time for the consciousness itself. Nothing supernatural but a totally natural evolutionary need and process. There is a deep therapy in standing alongside, through the silence and stillness, the greater energy or consciousness which envelops us, and which we often call God.

Anonymous, 2004

1.46 The mind wanders and the will falters again and again... But it is foolish to allow failures in concentration to plunge us into profitless self-condemnation. A mother does not condemn her child who is struggling with many a failure to learn how to walk, but rather she is pleased by each successful effort... I like to believe that God is similarly pleased with our efforts and understanding of our many failures. What matters is whether or not the will, like a compass needle when deflected, is so pivoted that it can swing back to the true direction.

St Francis de Sales is reassuring:

When your heart is wandering and distracted, bring it back quickly to its point, restore it tenderly to its Master's side, and if you did nothing else the whole of your hour but bring back your heart patiently and put it near our Lord again, and every time you put it back it turned away again, your hour would be well-employed.

Thomas F Green, 1952

For guidance on settling into worship, see the Resources.

Vocal ministry

1.47 In a meeting for worship, anyone may be led to share a message that the Light has revealed to them. This vocal ministry is one way that we minister to each other. By sharing what we have found in the depths of worship, we may be challenged, inspired and drawn together in community.

1.48 Words spoken in meeting for worship aren't automatically vocal ministry, but become vocal ministry when they move beyond the individual and build up the community that has gathered together. Vocal ministry is speech that 'serves' the meeting, that 'ministers' to the other worshippers. Vocal ministry is for the worshipping community at least as much as it's for the individual who speaks.

Mark Russ, 2023

1.49 Ministry is what is on one's soul, and it can be in direct contradiction to what is on one's mind. It's what the Inner Light gently pushes you toward or suddenly dumps in your lap. It is rooted in the eternity, divinity, and selflessness of the Inner Light; not in the worldly, egoistic functions of the conscious mind.

Marrianne McMullen, 1987

1.50 We believe that every person can be a channel for the Light. Once a meeting has settled, anyone, whatever their age or experience, may offer vocal ministry:

> Remember that to everyone is given a share of responsibility for the meeting for worship, whether that service be in silence or through the spoken word. Do not assume that vocal ministry is never to be your part. If the call to speak comes, do not let the sense of your own unworthiness, or the fear of being unable to find the right words, prevent you from being obedient to the leading of the Spirit. Ask wisdom of God that you may be sure of your guidance and be enabled humbly to discern and impart something of his glory and truth. Pray that your ministry may rise from the place of deep experience, and that you may be restrained from unnecessary and superficial words. Faithfulness and sincerity in speaking, even very briefly, may open the way to fuller ministry from others. Try to speak audibly and distinctly, with sensitivity to the needs of your fellow worshippers. Wait to be sure of the right moment for giving the message. Beware of making additions towards the end of a meeting when it was well left before.

Advices, 1964

1.51 When giving vocal ministry, speak simply, briefly and clearly. We should not allow self-doubt to hold us back from responding to a true prompting to speak. We should also be careful not to assume that every thought that feels important to us needs to be shared:

> Some Meetings for Worship are totally silent. Sometimes in the silence I may feel that I am being asked to stand and speak. I need to test this urge – is the message for me, or is it for everyone to hear? I may not understand the message: quite often this is because it is meant for someone else to hear. However, I must wait until it becomes clear that I cannot stay sitting – I must stand and speak.
>
> Mary Woodward, 2020

1.52 Normally, no one should speak more than once during a meeting for worship, and we should aim to avoid speaking too often or predictably:

> Some think, through a mistaken judgment, that they must be doing something every meeting (like the preachers of the letter, who must either be singing, preaching or praying all the time) and by such a conduct they lose their interest and place in the hearts of friends by too long and too frequent appearing in both preaching and prayer: for the avoiding of which, keep close to thy gift, intently waiting to know thy place, both when to speak and when to be silent; and when thou speakest, begin under a sense of divine influence, whether it be in preaching or praying; and without it, do not either preach or pray.
>
> Samuel Bownas, 1750

1.53 After someone has spoken, it is important to give time for the meeting to absorb the message before giving any further ministry. The quality of ministry depends on how it is received as much as how it is given:

> In silence which is active, the Inner Light begins to glow – a tiny spark. For the flame to be kindled and to grow, subtle argument and the clamour of our emotions must be stilled. It is by an attention full of love that we enable the Inner Light to blaze and illuminate our dwelling and to make of our whole being a source from which this Light may shine out.

> Words must be purified in a redemptive silence if they are to bear the message of peace. The right to speak is a call to the duty of listening. Speech has no meaning unless there are attentive minds and silent hearts. Silence is the welcoming acceptance of the other. The word born of silence must be received in silence.
>
> Pierre Lacout, 1969

1.54 Any ministry that follows will again come out of the silence and from the heart. In a single meeting for worship, several pieces of ministry may be offered, but it must not become a discussion. In a meeting for worship, we do not speak to argue with previous ministry or to persuade others of our point of view:

> I think that learning to move in the exercise of the meeting, so that one is a part of it, yet taken beyond it and brought to see some new light as a result of it, is most important in creative ministry. The cluster of messages, with a fair interval of silence between each of them to let its message sink in; the cluster that goes on down, with each message deepening and intensifying and helping to light up a further facet of the communication, can be most effective. But for this to happen those sharing in it cannot be in a discussional frame of mind or in a debating stance, or yield to the ruthlessly critical mind, or all is lost and the meeting is pulled into a forum. It can only be done if there is a willingness to be led by each of the ones ministering into a deeper level of what they were not only saying but what they were meaning to say, and perhaps even beyond into what something beneath us all was meaning to have said through what we were saying.
>
> Douglas Steere, 1972

1.55 The following extracts describe some Friends' experiences of vocal ministry.

1.56 As the minutes ticked by and I sat in the healing peace, I began to be aware that something inside me was formulating a question which urgently needed to be asked. I say 'something inside me' because it seemed at the same time to be both me and not me. I discovered to my horror that this something was urging me to get up and ask my question. My heart was pounding uncomfortably and I began to shiver... To start with I resisted this prompting. I looked round the room and noticed several Friends before whom I was reluctant to make a fool of myself. I could not get up and speak in front of them. I would rather die first. The shaking and pounding diminished a little as I decided this. But not for long. Soon it started up again, insistent, not to be denied. This time I told myself 'I'll count twenty and then if no one else has spoken I shall have to.' Again a slight abatement of the symptoms. But to no avail. I counted twenty and then fifty and still no one spoke. Now I sat conscious only of this overpowering force which was pushing me to my feet until finally I had to give in to it.

Afterwards I found it difficult to believe that I had spoken. It was all over so quickly. Had I really stood up in front of all those people and testified? Well, hardly testified, but yes, I had been driven by some inner prompting which, for want of a more precise word, one might well call spirit; and yes, I had quaked, most fearfully, with something which was more than just the fear of making a fool of myself before family and friends.

Elisabeth Salisbury, 1968

1.57 Once I sat in meeting for worship absolutely certain that I had a message which needed to be shared. However, I felt no leading whatsoever that I was the one to give the message. I waited and waited, feeling I would burst from the tension, until a woman across the room got up and gave my message much better than I could ever have given it. What was happening here? What did this mean in terms of the movement of the Spirit in our lives?

Shirley Dodson, 1980

1.58 I went to meetings in an awful frame of mind, and endeavoured to be inwardly acquainted with the language of the true Shepherd. And one day, being under a strong exercise of spirit, I stood up, and said some words in a meeting, but not keeping close to the divine opening, I said more than was required of me and being soon sensible to my error, I was afflicted in mind some weeks, without any light or comfort, even to that degree that I could take satisfaction in nothing. I remembered God and was troubled, and in the depth of my distress he had pity upon me, and sent the Comforter. I then felt forgiveness for my offence, and my mind became calm and quiet, being truly thankful to my gracious Redeemer for his mercies. And after this, feeling the spring of divine love opened, and a concern to speak, I said a few words in a meeting in which I found peace. This I believe was about six weeks from the first time, and as I was thus humbled and disciplined under the cross, my understanding became more strengthened to distinguish the language of the pure spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart, and taught me to wait in silence sometimes many weeks together, until I felt that rise which prepares the creature to stand like a trumpet, through which the Lord speaks to his flock.

John Woolman, 1741

1.59 Nor shall I forget the two-year-old boy who walked into a less than fruitful meeting – oh, they happen – twenty minutes before its end, found a pile of *Advices & queries* by the door and wove his way unsteadily around the chairs, handing each of us a copy. He took the trouble to open them all at the centre pages (live adventurously) and unknowingly quickened an occasion that was in danger of sinking. He wasn't aware of what he was doing. His primary motive was play. But I can't escape the thoughts that no one ever plans good ministry, that laughter is a fine antidote to solemnity and, crucially, that a message can and will come from any of the participants in a meeting, however much they may appear to lack experience.

Geoffrey Durham, 2011

Afterwords

1.60 Some Quaker meetings for worship are immediately followed by a short period that may be called 'afterword' or 'afterwords'. This provides a space for Friends to voice thoughts that were not felt to be ministry.

This practice can help Friends to gain a better understanding of the difference between spoken ministry and speaking at another time. It may also help some people to speak in front of the whole group. However, it can bring challenges and it will not be appropriate for every community.

For further guidance on afterwords, see the Resources.

Children in meeting

1.61 Children are equal members of the worshipping community. They should have the same opportunity to minister and take part in meeting for worship:

> One of the most moving Meetings I attended was one where a five-year-old stood and was clearly about to speak. His father leaned over to grab him, but the boy dodged his grab and delivered a most passionate and tenderly grieving message about how sad he felt that the dinosaurs were extinct. He spoke for several minutes and when he sat down there was a rich silence.
>
> Then an adult stood and talked about the importance of caring for all God's creatures. The whole Meeting that followed was on the theme of stewardship.
>
> Eric W Johnson, 1991

1.62 Many Quaker communities offer a children's meeting with separate activities at the same time as the meeting for worship. The children often join the adults for a short period at the beginning and/or the end of the meeting.

Some children's meetings also include a time of worship. A Friend describes inviting children to take responsibility for eldership during such meetings:

> I turned to Becky and Lara and asked them to 'elder' our meeting. Immediately I closed my eyes and settled into the silence.
>
> Under my calmness, I wasn't really sure. Would two nine-year-olds be capable? Should I give them a signal, a quiet nod, at the right time? I am glad I actually trusted them, because it was a true Meeting for Worship, everyone totally committed, taking us beyond ourselves.
>
> At the end they exclaimed to each other, 'When I turned to you, your hand was ready! How did you know? It works!'
>
> The pattern was set, and every week two of the children took a turn as elder. The elders took their job seriously, calling us back to God when needed: one day they had to speak very firmly to two older kids who were crawling round tickling our feet.
>
> Then came the turn of three-year-old Anna. I knew that Meeting for Worship would be short – and it was, about 40 seconds! I had no time to wriggle and settle, to calm my thoughts: I can only describe the adventure of faith as leaping off a high diving board into God's arms (I am afraid of heights).
>
> This is when I learned that a meeting does not have to last a specific time to be led by the Spirit. I was even more embarrassed to realise that I had not quite believed in 'that of God in every one', I had not really trusted that Quaker insight.
>
> Anna's grin of joy as she shook hands with the other elder convinced me.
>
> Anonymous, 2004

1.63 This passage includes some reflections by children on their experience of children's meetings:

Around the beginning of each term, we ask the children what they would like [to] do topic-wise and they choose a subject or ask a question which we then make a session about. Towards the end of the sessions we look at *Quaker faith & practice* to understand the relevant Quaker views.

Asked to reflect on our times together:

> **Isabella (age 5):** I like that we learn different topics while we are eating our breakfast!
>
> **Eva (age 9):** I like that we get [to] make our own topics: space, mental health, why do we get addicted to things, special occasions like Mother's Day, singing and drawing.
>
> **Eva again:** Our family believe that God is in everyone. I know we are Quakers and I want to learn about all the religions of the earth.

(When doing silent worship watching a video of rainforest animals; we had been doing a nature topic and I wanted to bring silent observing in):

Q: How do you feel when you watch the rainforest quietly?

> **Ada (age 5):** I feel in love, I feel in love with my sister!
>
> **Isabella:** It's so peaceful.

And a year later:

Q: What do you like about Meeting for Worship?

> **Isabella:** Mostly the people around me, because they're very nice. Also, I quite like sharing what we've done in Children's Meeting. I think [Quakers sit in silence] to show peace. [When I go into a Quaker meeting] I feel energised. I feel sane – calm, relaxed.

Eva: I like Meeting because it's not just that the kids have to sit in silence, cos then it would be very hard. But there's actually a Children's Meeting where you can be loud. Sitting in silence, for kids, I think it would be very boring and you wouldn't understand the meaning of it. But I'm not a kid, I'm a tween. So I know it's more than sitting in silence – it's thinking. And then some people stand up and say what they were thinking. When I come in at the end of Meeting, I don't really think, I just sit. I look at people. I like sitting in silence. I observe the people around me and I listen to the sounds that are there. That's what I like to do when I come into Meeting.

Westminster Meeting children's meeting, 2022–2023

For guidance on holding children's meetings, see the Resources.

Semi-programmed worship

1.64 In most meetings for worship, vocal ministry is not prepared in advance. It is expected to arise in the moment, from the experience of the meeting. We call this 'unprogrammed' worship. However, some meetings for worship incorporate planned readings or structured activities in the form of 'semi-programmed' worship.

One example of this is 'all-together' or 'all-age' worship. All meetings for worship are open to people of all ages, but having some planned readings and activities can help children to engage with worship. All-age worship may encourage older Friends to connect with their own childlike qualities. It can also be more accessible for people who for various reasons struggle to sit still for long periods. The activities should also have space around them in which the spirit of the meeting can develop. This provides a way into learning how worship is practised and what ministry is:

> Children learn about worship through coming to all-age worship. They can experience the benefits and power of silence; enjoy being

with adults (and vice versa) while still having a focused activity to guide them through the meeting for worship. Adults have the opportunity to worship in a different way, to minister through ways other than the spoken word, e.g. through creative activities or singing.

Children and Young People's Team,
Quakers in Britain, 2013

For guidance on all-age meetings for worship, see the Resources.

A gathered meeting

1.65 What is the ground and foundation of the gathered meeting? In the last analysis, it is, I am convinced, the Real Presence of God.

Thomas R Kelly, 1940

1.66 A 'gathered' meeting is how we describe a meeting for worship that has a deep sense of unity among those present:

A gathered Quaker meeting is something more than a number of individuals sitting down together but meditating individually. So long as each sits in meditation in the way one does when worshipping by oneself, the worship will seldom reach that greater depth which a Quaker meeting at its best achieves. The goal of a truly 'gathered' meeting is to become fused into something bigger than the sum of the parts...

As a meeting 'gathers', as each individual 'centres down', there gradually develops a feeling of belonging to a group who are together seeking a sense of the Presence. The 'I' in us begins to feel like 'we'. At some point – it may be early in the meeting or it may be later, or it may never occur at all – we suddenly feel a sense of unity, a sense of togetherness with one another and with that something outside ourselves that we call God.

Thomas R Bodine, 1980

1.67 A Friends' meeting, however silent, is at the very lowest a witness that worship is something other and deeper than words, and that it is to the unseen and eternal things that we desire to give the first place in our lives. And when the meeting, whether silent or not, is awake, and looking upwards, there is much more in it than this. In the united stillness of a truly 'gathered' meeting there is a power known only by experience, and mysterious even when most familiar. There are perhaps few things which more readily flow 'from vessel to vessel' than quietness. The presence of fellow-worshippers in some gently penetrating manner reveals to the spirit something of the nearness of the Divine Presence. 'Where two or three are gathered together in His name' have we not again and again felt that the promise was fulfilled and that the Master Himself was indeed 'in the midst of us'? And it is out of the depths of this stillness that there do arise at times spoken words which, springing from the very source of prayer, have something of the power of prayer – something of its quickening and melting and purifying effect. Such words as these have at least as much power as silence to gather into stillness.

Caroline E Stephen, 1908

1.68 As iron sharpeneth iron, the seeing of the faces one of another when both are inwardly gathered into the life, giveth occasion for the life secretly to rise and pass from vessel to vessel. As many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the light and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together into the same life there is more of the glory of God, and His power appears to the refreshment of each individual, for that he partakes not only of the light and life raised in himself but in all the rest.

Robert Barclay, 1678

1.69 Unless we are extremely unfortunate in our journey through the Society of Friends we all know when we have experienced a

gathered meeting: a meeting where the silence is as soft as velvet, as deep as a still pool; a silence where words emerge, only to deepen and enrich that rich silence, and where Presence is as palpable and soft as the skin of a peach; where the membrane separating this moment in time and eternity is filament-fine.

Gerald Hewitson, 2013

1.70 Not every meeting for worship is gathered:

In a gathered meeting there may be few spoken words, but there is rich ministry. An hour passes quickly. Other meetings are lifeless. They may be full of words, but there is little ministry, little that is of service. Time drags and people feel the need to fill the silence.

Exploring the fundamental elements of Quakerism (conference), 1986

1.71 In the following extracts, Friends describe the different kinds of silence we may encounter in a meeting for worship, and what sets a gathered meeting apart.

1.72 There are many different forms of silence – and you'll get them all at some time in a Quaker meeting.

Type One: No one says anything. This is the same sort of silence you get in a doctor's waiting room or a train. Most people in the room are probably still thinking... in isolation – different thoughts about thousands of things... If you could hear those thoughts, it would be a cacophony.

Type Two: No one says anything because they are waiting; the sort of silence before the curtain comes up or the orchestra starts playing... people are thinking along the same lines but not sure what is coming next. If you could hear these thoughts, they would be a single note sung in unison, or a collective intake of breath.

Type Three: People are silent together, they share the silence: it's less passively expectant, more positively active… Quakers call it a gathered silence, and sometimes from out of this silence someone else will put into words exactly what you were thinking… It's a silence charged with energy, the silence of a wave in the sea. It has power.

Type Four: People become still together. Like into some great whirlpool, thoughts, noise, busyness, are drained from the room; and what remains is a deep, profound stillness all the deeper because we are all holding it together and it is within us and without us. At this level, you become aware of the interconnectedness of all things, of the potential for love in every particle of the universe… This is more than silence; it is complete stillness, beautiful, wonderful and rare.

And the weirdest thing of all? At the end of the meeting, when everyone shakes hands… everyone knows what sort of silence it was.

Jamie Wrench, *c.*2010

1.73 Later on in the hour the silence seems to gather weight and become 'heavy'; like wading through thick mud or groping through dense mist, but without getting stuck or lost. This is what, for me, the 'gathered' Meeting is, when everyone's thought and focus seem to be settled, concentrated, perhaps pointing the same way. We may all be contemplating different things, but we seem to have a common direction in the 'heavy' silence. If everyone knows that something momentous has occurred in the world, such as some dreadful accident or terrorist attack, or if there's been a death in the Meeting, then you can literally feel the weight of common thought: it seems almost tangible. Perhaps you could even say that this is really all one thought. We are one.

Anonymous, 2009

1.74 Quakers talk about a 'gathered' meeting which occurs when, for those present, time stands still; we are 'at the still point of the turning world', a moment when we encounter eternity… acknowledging our calling to seek to build the Kingdom of God on earth, knowing that we will be given the strength we need to play our part in this. A truly gathered meeting may not happen very often but every meeting is a reminder of this possibility and an opportunity to reflect on what this means. The awareness of those encounters with eternity underpins our whole life.

Peter Eccles, 2020

1.75 In the following extracts, some Friends reflect on what draws them back to meeting for worship and how it affects them.

1.76 I wait
I still myself
I am often encountered
I am always changed

Anonymous, 2004

1.77 Quakers often talk about values being the attractive part of Quakerism. This is especially true when talking to young people and children. There is a sense in which our values, or testimonies, are where the action is, the place where Quakerism is at its most relevant…

As a relatively new attender I can say that I love the small Quaker community of which I am a part. They support and guide me; they provide a deep welcome for me and my daughters… but it is not these things that keep me coming back week after week.

What keeps me coming back is that we, as a community, go seeking in the stillness together, and, every once in a while, we catch a fuzzy glimpse of the edge of That Unfathomable Thing that lies at the

bottom of everything, and we allow that glimpsing to change us. It is from this glimpsing that our values and testimonies arise...

Where we lack dogma we hold fast to a reliable tradition of seeking and waiting in meeting for worship and speaking boldly during or after when so led. If we are to say anything to the world about our Quakerism let it boldly be this: In meeting for worship we learn how to be.

Jo Baynham, 2024

1.78 The Quaker Way is to live in the Truth and the Life. Meeting for Worship returns me to the centre more than solitary prayer. It's a circular process: of life lived in the world and considered honestly in the stillness and Light of the gathered meeting. It changes you. When I take my lived experience to the gathered meeting it is illuminated and clarified: seemingly important matters of ego give way to an all encompassing experience of forgiveness and love which is the eternal Truth. You can be, to paraphrase C S Lewis, surprised by the joy of it. Over time you trust it more. For the Quaker Way to flourish in meeting you need to give the Spirit a chance to breathe through you, and for that breath to join with others there. It is community in action.

Nicola James Maharg, 2020

1.79 In worship, we peel ourselves open, we share our segments, we are beautifully, painfully, reminded that we exist. We are filled with light.

We are aware of our power, and of the responsibility that comes with it to act, in faith, that we can build a better world. We have a sense of growing confidence in ourselves as a community, built upon our willingness to ask ourselves the tough questions, and being aware that we will always have to ask those, to continue to challenge ourselves.

Young Friends General Meeting, 2023

1.80 As we met in worship, with the early spring sunshine streaming in through the windows of the meeting house, the sweet power of the Spirit helped us come into the slower rhythms of grace, where we can hear and rely on the Guide's voice. We heard a call to the peace of abiding in the Vine, the source of our faithful work in the world. We must allow ourselves to be pruned so that we can bear the fruit we are called to bear. We are called, not to lives of busyness, but to give over our own willing and running; resting in the Presence, the tasks that are truly ours come into view, and as God has God's way with us, we find that our lives are given new depth and new meaning.

Oxford Young Adult Friends, 2025

Chapter 2:

Quaker spiritual experience

2.01 You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of light, and hast walked in the light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?

George Fox, 1652

Introduction

2.02 The Quaker movement grows from our experience that each person can have a direct encounter with the Spirit. Our faith is based on following the Spirit's guidance and allowing it to change us. This can happen alone, in shared worship or in the midst of daily life.

Quakers have always used many ways to describe their spiritual experience, and this chapter includes a rich diversity of reflections. It includes:

- Experiences of spiritual encounter
- Moments of connection
- An accompanied life
- The Spirit in daily life
- Creativity
- Prayer
- Exploring the Spirit with others
- Times of spiritual dryness and suffering

Experiences of spiritual encounter

2.03 Quakers throughout our history have had powerful experiences of spiritual encounter and transformation. Sometimes these bring a sudden insight, a sense of healing and joy, or a compelling summons to action.

2.04 In the beginning of the year 1655, I was at the plough in the east parts of Yorkshire in Old England, near the place where my outward being was; and, as I walked after the plough, I was filled with the love and presence of the living God, which did ravish my heart when I felt it, for it did increase and abound in me like a living stream, so did the life and love of God run through me like precious ointment giving a pleasant smell, which made me to stand still. And, as I stood a little still, with my heart and mind stayed upon the Lord, the word of the Lord came to me in a still, small voice, which I did hear perfectly, saying to me in the secret of my heart and conscience, 'I have ordained thee a prophet unto the nations', and, at the hearing of the word of the Lord, I was put to a stand, seeing that I was but a child for such a weighty matter.

Marmaduke Stevenson, 1659

2.05 Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword, into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness and innocency and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus; so that I say that I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell...

Great things did the Lord lead me into, and wonderful depths were opened unto me, beyond what can by words be declared. But as people come into subjection to the spirit of God, and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the Word of wisdom that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being.

George Fox, 1648

2.06 But oh! the joy that filled my soul in the first meeting ever held in our house at Chalfont. To this day I have a fresh remembrance of it. It was then the Lord enabled me to worship him in that which was undoubtedly his own, and give up my whole strength, yea, to swim in the life which overcame me that day. Oh! long had I desired to worship him with acceptation, and lift up my hands without doubting, which I witnessed that day in that assembly. I acknowledged his great mercy and wonderful kindness; for I could say, 'This is it which I have longed and waited for, and feared I never should have experienced'.

Mary Penington, *c.*1680

2.07 At last, after all my distresses, wanderings and sore travails, I met with some writings of this people called Quakers, which I cast a slight eye upon and disdained, as falling very short of that wisdom, light, life and power, which I had been longing for and searching after... After a long time, I was invited to hear one of them (as I had been often, they in tender love pitying me and feeling my want of that which they possessed)... When I came, I felt the presence and power of the Most High among them, and words of truth from the Spirit of truth reaching to my heart and conscience, opening my state as in the presence of the Lord. Yea, I did not only feel words and demonstrations from without, but I felt the dead quickened, the seed raised; insomuch as my heart, in the certainty of light and clearness of true sense, said: 'This is he; this is he; there is no other; this is he whom I have waited for and sought after from my childhood, who was always near me, and had often begotten life in my heart, but I knew him not distinctly, nor how to receive him or dwell with him.'

Isaac Penington, 1667

2.08 In due time the witness of God was awakened in me, whereby my sins came to be set in order before me; and it brought judgement and condemnation upon me by reason of them. But I, being like

the wild heifer which is unaccustomed to the yoke, sought to get from under it, as I often did, until I came to know something of the power of God, which brought that wild nature in me, which was unaccustomed to the yoke, into subjection... When I was about seventeen years of age, the power of the Lord God did work mightily and effectually in me, purging, cleansing, and sanctifying me; and then I began to see something of the gloriousness of the ministration of condemnation, and of the goodness of the Word of life, which was become 'as a fire in my bones', and 'as a sword and hammer in my heart'. I began to be broken, melted and overcome with the love of God, which sprang up in my heart, and with the divine and precious promises that were confirmed to my soul. Oh! the preciousness and excellency of that day! Oh! the glory and blessedness of that day!

William Caton, 1653

2.09 John Greenleaf Whittier was a nineteenth-century Massachusetts Quaker, journalist and anti-slavery campaigner. The following hymn, well known beyond the Religious Society of Friends, is part of a longer poem in which he compares ecstatic religious practices with the experience arising from silent waiting upon God:

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.
In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow Thee.
O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee

The silence of eternity
Interpreted by love!
With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of Thy call,
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall
As fell Thy manna down.
Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.
Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm.

John Greenleaf Whittier, 1872

2.10 At the age of 21, Caroline Fox wrote in her journal of 'the struggle through which a spark of true faith was lighted in my soul':

> The first gleam of light, 'the first cold light of morning' which gave promise of day with its noontide glories, dawned on me one day at meeting, when I had been meditating on my state in great depression. I seemed to hear the words articulated in my spirit, 'Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.' Then I believed that God speaks to man by His Spirit. I strove to lead a more Christian life, in unison with what I knew to be right, and looked for brighter days, not forgetting the blessings that are granted to prayer.

Caroline Fox, 1841

2.11 Thomas R Kelly had vivid experiences of the love of God, which he described in his 'Testament of devotion':

To you who are seekers, to you, young and old who have toiled all night and caught nothing, but who want to launch out into the deeps and let down your nets for a draught, I want to speak as simply, as tenderly, as clearly as I can. For God *can* be found. There *is* a last rock for your souls, a resting-place of absolute peace and joy and power and radiance and security. There is a Divine Center into which your life can slip, a new and absolute orientation in God, a Center where you live with Him and out of which you see all of life through new and radiant vision, tinged with new sorrows and pangs, new joys unspeakable and full of glory... The reality of Presence has been very great at times recently. One knows at first hand what the old inquiry meant, "Has Truth been advancing among you?"

Thomas R Kelly, 1941

2.12 Jenny McCarthy recalls a moment when she encountered God:

A while ago I had a revelation.

I didn't know it was coming (well, there's a surprise). I wasn't prepared for it. I was no Joan of Arc or George Fox. I'd thought things like that didn't happen in this day and age, in nice, safe Britain. They'd been confined to the Bible, the beginnings of Quaker history and deeply spiritual mystics ... I went for a walk. It was dark by the time I got to a rock on the brow of the hill and sat down facing the sea. I felt very alone as I closed my eyes and tried to empty my mind. I didn't succeed, but I had no distraction but my thoughts. I could see nothing. I could hear nothing but the wind, and there was no one with me but God.

Suddenly I knew what God was and that God knew me. This was a direct experience of the Divine. It was like meeting someone face-to-face after previously only speaking to them on the telephone. It was both awe-inspiring and terrifying – as the rabbit must feel when blinded by the headlights. I get the same feelings thinking about it even now.

It hasn't happened again. I get the impression that it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience. But now I know, whether I'm sitting in meeting for worship trying to centre down, or just on my own in a busy street, that God is here. It's a life-changing bit of knowledge. It doesn't matter if I can't connect with the Divine every single week, and really it doesn't matter what else happens. God is here.

Jenny McCarthy, 2010

2.13 Susan Davies writes of a transformative experience during a walk in the Pennines near Bradford:

As we began to draw away into the night we looked upwards and we could only stand in wonderment and awe for there was nothing between us and the overwhelming canopy of stars above us. The silence was intense. Never had the stars seemed so bright, so near and so many; they stretched on forever in their millions...

I felt something else and that was fear, and the memory of that fear has never left me. I know now that it was the moment that I lost God, the God of my childhood, the paternal Father, the Comforter. It was the moment when I came to realise that the concept of God was something so very different. Where did we fit in within this seemingly never-ending universe? As if to bring further questions about the place and the role of humankind in this universe the sound of an air raid siren split the silence and immediately the searchlights were switched on, their powerful man-made shafts of light sweeping across the skies and pointing upwards into the starlit vastness above.

It was to be the start of a spiritual journey which has taken me through many phases of searching: through dark alleys of questioning and doubt; through broad lanes of the study of the evolution of man, of other religions and political activity and finally an introduction to the sciences of matter and energy, of which I still know little, but the little I do know has led me back to that myriad of stars and to what an unknown mediaeval writer

called 'The Cloud of Unknowing'. But what I now know, without any doubt, is that the two journeys made that day, the one uphill carrying a pre-conceived belief and the journey downhill with that belief open to question, were both part of the journey on which I am still making my way, and that it is the journey that is important, not the hope of gaining ultimate knowledge about God or of holding a dogmatic idea of Truth.

Susan Davies, 1995

Moments of connection

2.14 Some encounters with the Spirit are sparked by the beauty of the world around us. They may only last a moment, but their influence can stay with us for a lifetime.

2.15 From 'Written on Light'

Such a delicate cusp
this evening: the sky,
the sea
and the barely
discernible hinge between them.

No, I don't believe
in Judgement but yes,
we will be held
to account.
Like this. In every detail.

Held, that is, as in a rare
find, fine china, the one of itself,
with its flaws, held
gently and exactly.
Held up, to be filled with light

Philip Gross, 2017

2.16 The child is alone for the first time in a field of bright grasses. The grass is tall. It reaches above her shoulders. She is submerged in light, standing on uncertain feet in a field of green and gold, a toddler in paradise. The grass sings. It flashes like the fire of a million emeralds; her small heart contracts with the terror of separation and then expands to fill the universe. She is no longer intimately connected to one human being. She is somehow connected to everything in the universe, full of it, into it, part of it. For one shining moment she and the universe are one.

Minutes pass. Time passes. The child is no longer in time. The grasses swell and surge like the movement of a great ocean of light. She walks in the light, runs in it, swims in it, is part of the dancing and no longer afraid.

A cloud goes over the sun. A shadow falls on the bright world. The mother's voice calls anxiously. The child is aware of loneliness, cries, and stumbles back into time. But she does not forget the ocean of light in a field of bright grasses.

Jo Farrow, 1990

2.17 Llygedyn

Beth yw'r goedwig ond brigyn? – A'r eira
Mawr oer? Dim ond plufyn.
A'r byd i gyd? Llygedyn
O olau Duw ym meddwl dyn.

A gleam

What is the forest but a branch? – And the deep
cold snow? But a feather.
And the whole wide world? But a gleam
of God's light in the mind of man.

Mererid Hopwood, 2015

2.18 A sudden concentration of attention on a rainy August morning. Clusters of bright red berries, some wrinkled, some blemished, others perfect, hanging among green leaves. The experience could not have lasted more than a few seconds, but that was a moment out of time. I was caught up in what I saw: I became a part of it: the berries, the leaves, the raindrops and I, we were all of a piece. A moment of beauty and harmony and meaning. A moment of understanding.

Ralph Hetherington, 1975

2.19 One morning I went with a friend to visit a nearby neolithic site known as Cairn Holy. This consists of two burial mounds whose chambers have collapsed, leaving only the largest stones of the original structures exposed. [At] the first mound, [we felt] the power and peacefulness of this place where people had gathered for religious ceremonies so many centuries before... the second, smaller grave... was in a more exposed situation than the first, less welcoming, yet powerful in a different way. As we began to walk back..., deep in thoughtful conversation, we passed the first group of stones again. I suddenly 'knew' I had to go and lie face down on a huge recumbent stone that lay beside the entrance to the tumulus. As I lay down on this rock, which was both deeply cold and yet superficially warmed by the summer sun, I momentarily lost my usual sense of who 'I' am. My identity as a separate being dissolved, I *became* the stone I was lying on, as well as the grass and sorrel growing in the foreground, the fields in the distance and the sea beyond. There was no distinction between 'me' and any of these other elements of existence.

It was not a frightening experience, yet after it nothing would ever seem the same again. I experienced the world as a different place, though everything looked as it had before. I remember it as a breaking-through, a glimpse of a way of knowing reality that I cannot live day by day but the awareness of which changes everything.

Alex Wildwood, 1999

2.20 Why am I a Quaker? Sometimes, I am transformed by a powerful force. It has unrelentingly dragged me shaking to my feet in Meeting for Worship as I burn with something to say; it has held me as I walk through a still avenue of huge sycamore trees, worrying about a family member who has just been admitted to hospital; it has filled me with joy as I contemplate a vista of sky and landscape from the top of a mountain; it has been present between me and my partner after making love, as we lie in a kind of timeless intimacy. Sometimes I feel centred and moved by something beyond my own experience. It is a kind of force which prompts me, prompts my conscience, my emotions, my desires.

Anonymous, 1998

An accompanied life

2.21 Our relationship with the Spirit can grow into a steady trust that shapes how we live each day. This sense of being 'accompanied' can give us strength to persevere through darkness and difficulty.

2.22 I write as a Quaker who came to meeting as an atheist/agnostic, drawn in by the peace testimony, an ex-anarchist, happy to find another place without leaders and without votes. Two years in, I had an experience aboard a Greyhound bus in America that gave me a sense of being lifted up, held, and since then perpetually accompanied by what I call God, but which I know is ultimately a mystery that is not for me to know too closely. Thus Quakerism moved for me from being a primarily political affiliation to a place where I could connect and reconnect with that grace-filled sense of being watched over, guarded and guided... It has given me exactly the form of worship and the opportunity for expression and service that matches my own experience of direct inward encounter.

Ben Pink Dandelion, 2009

2.23 Our strength or help is only in God; but then it is near us, it is in us – a force superior to all possible opposition – a force that never was, nor can be foiled. We are free to stand in this unconquerable ability, and defeat the powers of darkness; or to turn from it, and be foiled and overcome. When we stand, we know it is God alone upholds us; and when we fall, we feel that our fall or destruction is of ourselves.

Job Scott, 1797

2.24 How can we walk with a smile into the dark? We must learn to put our trust in God and the leadings of the Spirit. How many of us are truly led by the Spirit throughout our daily lives? I have turned to God when I have had a difficult decision to make or when I have sought strength to endure the pain in dark times. But I am only slowly learning to dwell in the place where leadings come from. That is a place of love and joy and peace, even in the midst of pain. The more I dwell in that place, the easier it is to smile, because I am no longer afraid.

If we dwell in the presence of God, we shall be led by the spirit. We do well to remember that being led by the spirit depends not so much upon God, who is always there to lead us, as upon our willingness to be led. We need to be willing to be led into the dark as well as through green pastures and by still waters. We do not need to be afraid of the dark, because God is there. The future of this earth need not be in the hands of the world's 'leaders'. The world is in God's hands if we are led by God. Let us be led by the Spirit. Let us walk with a smile into the dark.

Gordon Matthews, 1987

2.25 Religion is living with God. There is no other kind of religion. Living with a Book, living with or by a Rule, being awfully high-principled are not in themselves religion, although many people think they are and that that is all there is to it. Religion has got a bad name through being identified with an outward orderliness. But an outward orderliness can be death, dullness and masochism. Doing your duty may be admirable stoicism; it isn't religion.

To find religion itself you must look inside people and inside yourself. And there, if you find even the tiniest grain of true love, you may be on the right scent. Millions of people have it and don't know what it is that they have. God is their guest, but they haven't the faintest idea that he is in the house. So you mustn't only look where God is confessed and acknowledged. You must look everywhere, to find the real religion. Nor must you look, in others or in yourself, for great spooky visions and revelations. Such visions and revelations come to many, a great deal oftener than we think; and to those to whom they come they are sun, moon and stars. But in most people who know God, and in all such people most of the time, living with God is not an apparition but a wordless and endless sureness. Like the silence of two friends together. Like the silence of lovers.

God is waiting to live like that in every single person in the world.

Bernard Canter 1962

The Spirit in daily life

2.26 For Quakers the whole of life is sacred, and spiritual life goes hand in hand with our everyday commitments. The Spirit is accessible in the ordinary things that surround us day to day.

2.27 Be aware of the spirit of God at work in the ordinary activities and experiences of your daily life. Spiritual learning continues throughout life and often in unexpected ways. There is inspiration to be found all around us, in the natural world, in the sciences and arts, in our work and friendships, in our sorrows as well as in our joys. Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment?

Ymglywch ag ysbryd Duw ar waith yng ngweithgareddau cyffredin a phrofiad eich byw beunyddiol. Pery addysg ysbrydol gydol bywyd, yn aml mewn ffyrdd annisgwyl. Ceir ysbrydoliaeth o'n hamgylch ym mhobman, ym myd natur, yn y gwyddorau a'r celfyddydau, yn

ein gwaith a'n cyfeillgarwch, yn ein gofidiau fel yn ein llawenydd. A ydych yn agored i oleuni newydd, o ba ffynhonnell bynnag y dêl? A ydych yn ddetholgar wrth ystyried syniadau newydd?

Advices & queries / Cynghorion a holiadau 7, 1994

2.28 Being Quaker, there are no boxes to put things away tidily. Nor are there boundaries between the ordinary everyday things and things of the spirit. Both seem to overlap somehow, and become one.

Towards the source, 2014

2.29 We had four children with two years between each, so the first years were full. It was essential at that stage, I found, to see God in the busyness, in the caring and activity, rather than fight to find a place for God outside it. Go with and use the rhythms of your life as it is.

Beth Allen, 2007

2.30 All our senses are given to us to enjoy, and to praise God. The smell of the sea, of the blossom borne on the wind, of the soft flesh of a little baby; the taste of a ripe plum or of bread fresh from the oven, the feel of warm cat's fur or the body of a lover – these are all forms of thanksgiving prayer. I am sure that it is as wrong to fail to delight in our bodies as it is to misuse them through excess. Not to be a glutton does not mean that we may not delight in good food: not to be ruled by lust does not mean that we must not enjoy the exquisite pleasures of sex: not to be slothful does not mean that we must never lie in the sun, not doing, just being. When Jesus said 'I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly', I do not think He was talking only of spiritual life – I think He meant us to have positive delight in all the good things in this wonderful world that His Father created.

Bella Brown, *c.*1980

2.31 It is not religion that matters so much. It is life. It is not religion that requires our deepest respect and reverence. It is life, the life springing up in ourselves and others, the life of all living things and of the planet on which we pursue our inter-connected lives. Real religion is always liberating and helps us to be aware of the holy thing that Life is. Its purpose is to make us more, rather than less, alive, and to free us from whatever restricts the flow of life within us.

Jo Farrow, 1990

2.32 For a Quaker, religion is not an external activity, concerning a special 'holy' part of the self. It is an openness to the world in the here and now with the whole of the self. If this is not simply a pious commonplace, it must take into account the whole of our humanity: our attitudes to other human beings in our most intimate as well as social and political relationships. It must also take account of our life in the world around us, the way we live, the way we treat animals and the environment. In short, to put it in traditional language, there is no part of ourselves and of our relationships where God is not present.

Harvey Gillman, 1988

2.33 What is love? What shall I say of it, or how shall I in words express its nature? It is the sweetness of life; it is the sweet, tender, melting nature of God, flowing up through his seed of life into the creature, and of all things making the creature most like unto himself, both in nature and operation. It fulfils the law, it fulfils the gospel; it wraps up all in one, and brings forth all in the oneness. It excludes all evil out of the heart, it perfects all good in the heart. A touch of love doth this in measure; perfect love doth this in fulness.

Isaac Penington, 1663

Creativity

2.34 There are many ways to discover and explore the Spirit in our lives. Creative work and expression often have a spiritual dimension. In meeting for worship, the Spirit and creativity can flow freely together.

2.35 Good poems, like good Meetings for Worship, are full of spaces. They leave us free to think about what's between the lines.

Sibyl Ruth, 2011

2.36 Sally Beamish is a composer and musician. She writes:

When I first returned to Quakers, I found I was able to free my mind from all the worries of the week and the endless busyness of home life; and music would simply drop into my head. I realised that the silent waiting experienced in meeting is something that is necessary in creative work too. You don't always have to be actively 'doing' to shape a piece of music. Gestation is necessary too – stepping back and allowing the music to arrive.

Sally Beamish, 2020

2.37 When I look back at my decision to embark on the 'ordinary activity' of joining the choir, I realise it was something I had longed to do for many years, but had ignored the 'nudges'. There was always a good reason why I couldn't do it, but mainly it was busyness and a fear of the unknown – and the older I got, the more difficult it became. I hadn't recognised my need to receive spiritual nurture in this unexpected form. At the time, I didn't think of it as a 'spiritual decision' at all, yet I have to say that if one of the criteria is to 'feel God's pleasure', then that is certainly true when I sing, and the sense of joy and faithfulness is, for me, confirmation I was rightly led. Hopefully in future I will take heed a bit quicker.

Moira Fitt, 2006

2.38 As a teenager I first really knew about the Spirit within me when I danced. Here was a way at last of stilling the thoughts, questions and reasonings in my head, and just being. My body became alive in response to the music and my emotions were unlocked. I knew a joy and openness that was new to me.

As an adult I still find spontaneous free movement to music a religious experience; emotions and reactions come from deep within me and not through conscious thought. To dance in this way with others – meeting and sharing without words but with open receptiveness – is an uplifting experience.

Jennifer Fishpool, 1991

Prayer

2.39 Prayer can be practised and understood in many ways. Quakers often experience prayer as an openness to the Spirit, within us and in the world. To develop our practice of prayer, sometimes we need both perseverance and gentleness with ourselves.

2.40 Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion.

Isaac Penington, 1661

2.41 The place of prayer is a precious habitation. I saw this habitation to be safe, to be inwardly quiet, when there was great stirrings and commotion in the world.

John Woolman, 1770

2.42 Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power, from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms. That it is which moulds up into patience, into innocency, into soberness, into stillness, into stayedness, into quietness, up to God with his power.

George Fox, 1658

2.43 Through prayer for others, and with them, in a spirit of fellowship and service, we may know that channels are dug whereby they and we together may experience the flowings through us of the very life of God.

Christian practice, 1911

2.44 This Prayer Has No Words

This prayer has no words.
It has no request, no plea,
no expectation of fulfilment,
nor does it belong entirely to me.

This prayer has no words.
Its connection is direct, uncluttered.
Peripheral thoughts slip softly out of focus.
A mind, a heart, a whole being
reaches out to its spiritual source.

This prayer has no words.
It is an intensity in the chest, a free tightness of breath
at the same time excited and nervous.
A boundless feeling, an energy finding direction.

This prayer has no words.
It was not planned or written before

but caught me in a burst
as I looked to the sky.

Joanna Waters, 2010

2.45 Prayer is an act of sharing with God, the Spirit, and not an attempt to prompt God to action. It is a promise that I will do my best, even if what I am able to do seems too insignificant to be worthwhile.

Anna, 1984

2.46 God does not do things for us – he enables us to do them for ourselves.

Elisabeth Holmgaard, 1984

2.47 Turning to the Spirit, even for a moment, takes us to a deeper place of connection. I believe this is reaching deep within ourselves for the strength to face what it means to be human in this world – to steady ourselves – a reaching beneath conscious thought – a desire to give attention to [we know not what or whom], to focus. To mark peak experience. A moment between breaths, a regular practice of meditative prayer, a regular reading, a pause between one activity and the next, to uphold someone.

Jennifer Kavanagh quoting Annique, 2023

2.48 Prayer is not just a matter of the feelings, but of the will. When we least feel like praying and when prayer seems pointless because there appears to be no-one to accept it – when God indeed seems absent, then is the time to call our will into action and refuse to give up. There will be occasions when our desert will seem only dry and barren. But refreshment is not far away, and we must persevere, holding on to the promise that the parched ground shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water.

Jack Dobbs, 1984

2.49 Tips for Practical Praying

Relax about it and don't worry. Throw away guilt if you find prayer difficult.

Think creatively and widely about what prayer might be and find a way that suits you. It could be weeding the garden, drawing mandalas, walking the dog, painting, playing the violin. Choose something that is not technically too difficult to free up the mind and the imagination.

Make a regular time for your prayer activity. Not necessarily daily, although that is helpful, but try to make it regular, like brushing your teeth.

Make a place for it. No need to mortify the flesh. Find a comfortable corner, a place you like and can return to in imagination when you are not there, and make it your own private spot.

Consider prayer an adventure and prepare to be surprised. Write down your results and any tasks that come up.

Above all, enjoy yourself.

Helen Steven, 2005

2.50 Prayer

May that which brings forth
Love and Grace and Beauty,
Come to us;
And shape us;
So that we may become
That which brings forth
Love and Grace and Beauty.

Alan Bainbridge, 2015

Exploring the Spirit with others

2.51 We can become more open to the Spirit by sharing our spiritual lives with others. This might be with a friend, as part of a small group, or with someone experienced in spiritual practice.

2.52 Spiritual friendships are meetings with another person to talk about one's faith life, insights and spiritual discoveries... We meet together to anticipate the presence of the Spirit, to discern the movement of the Spirit in our lives.

Trish Roberts, 1999

2.53 To listen another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another. For in penetrating to what is involved in listening do we not disclose the thinness of the filament that separates people listening openly to one another and that of God intently listening to each soul?... the task of all spiritual guidance is to take people to the living Listener, and leave them there.

Douglas Steere, 1955

2.54 Quakers refer to each other as 'Friends', and friendship in all its aspects plays an important role in Quaker spirituality. A friend is not just someone whose company we enjoy, but one who values what is most important to us. A friend cares about our genuine well-being, and is willing to challenge as well as to affirm us in our efforts to realise it. Friendship enables us to know that we are not alone in the spiritual life, that others are struggling, learning, failing and persevering alongside us; drawn by a longing for connection with the same Inward Guide. We can help each other to develop this connection by our patience with each other, our care for one another, our honesty and openness about everything that is most precious and most difficult in our lives.

Craig Barnett, 2019

2.55 I have found in my life that from time to time when revelling in new-found joys or faced with decision, problem or grief, there must be for me a listening ear. Even if my listener says little but sheds over me a feeling of rejoicing with me, of being alongside me as I strive, of sorrowing with me in my hour of distress, then I can better appreciate or face the situation. I believe this is true for most of us. There are moments when we need one another. If this sometimes unuttered cry is answered, then truly we meet, and do not grope or slip past each other. But if two individuals share at an even deeper level from out of their own experience in their search for ultimate reality in life, then the divine in the human shines through and a new creation is born for both.

Margaret S Gibbins, 1969

Times of spiritual dryness and suffering

2.56 For everyone there are times when it is hard to be open to the Spirit. These extracts describe how some Quakers have lived through spiritual trials.

2.57 James Nayler was a leading figure in the early Quaker movement:

There is a spirit which I feel that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations. As it bears no evil in itself, so it conceives none in thoughts to any other. If it be betrayed, it bears it, for its ground and spring is the mercies and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness, its life is everlasting love unfeigned; it takes its kingdom with entreaty and not with contention, and keeps it by lowliness of mind. In God alone it can rejoice, though none else regard it, or can own its life. It's conceived in sorrow, and brought forth without any to pity it, nor doth it murmur at grief and oppression. It never rejoiceth but through sufferings; for with the world's joy

it is murdered. I found it alone, being forsaken. I have fellowship therein with them who lived in dens and desolate places in the earth, who through death obtained this resurrection and eternal holy life.

James Nayler, 1660

2.58 In 1945, Kenneth Boulding published a collection of poems based on Nayler's life and ministry:

And to Weary Out All Exaltation & Cruelty

What patience must we cherish, to out-wear
The sleepless hosts of hell, who lie in wait
Against our slightest weakness, early, late,
With perseverance more than we can bear.
How can we wait the many a weary year
Before the rock of pride, and cruel hate,
Into a fruitful earth disintegrate
Under the tears of love and near-despair?

Who then can blame us if we lose our trust
In love's slow ways, and hastily rush to blast
The rock to pieces – but to find at last
When smoke has cleared, not earth, but barren dust.
Only by endless rain the soil is given,
And endless patience is the way of heaven.

Kenneth E Boulding, 1945

2.59 My life has been one of great vicissitude: mine has been a hidden path, hidden from every human eye. I have had deep humiliations and sorrows to pass through. I can truly say I have 'wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way, and found no city to dwell in'; and yet how wonderfully I have been sustained. I have passed through many and great dangers, many ways – I have

been tried with the applause of the world, and none know how great a trial that has been, and the deep humiliations of it; and yet I fully believe it is not nearly so dangerous as being made much of in religious society. There is a snare even in religious unity, if we are not on the watch. I have sometimes felt that it was not so dangerous to be made much of in the world, as by those whom we think highly of in our own Society: the more I have been made much of by the world, the more I have been inwardly humbled. I could often adopt the words of Sir Francis Bacon – 'When I have ascended before men, I have descended in humiliation before God.'

Elizabeth Fry, 1844

2.60 Isolation of spirit... comes to most – perhaps all of us – at one time or another. There are times in our lives when the tides of faith seem far out, times of dryness, times when we do not feel the comfort and guidance of God's hand. At such times we may stay away from meeting, feeling that it does not give us the spiritual help that we need; or it may be that we continue to go and are to outward appearance actively engaged on the meeting's life and business, while, within, we feel the agonies of isolation and the longing for light to lighten our darkness. I can think with thankfulness of Friends who have brought light to my darkness – perhaps a single sentence, a friendly letter, a walk on the downs: their help was perhaps given unconsciously, but it was because they were sensitive to God's leadings that they were able to do it. Do we seek to be the channels of God's love and caring? 'Caring matters most.'

Edward H Milligan, 1951

2.61 The resurrection, however literally or otherwise we interpret it, demonstrates the power of God, to bring life out of brokenness; not just to take the hurt out of brokenness but to add something to the world. It helps us to sense the usefulness, the possible meaning in

our suffering, and to turn it into a gift. The resurrection affirms me with my pain and my anger at what has happened. It does not take away my pain; it still hurts. But I sense that I am being transfigured; I am being enabled to begin again to love confidently and to remake the spirit of my world.

S Jocelyn Burnell, 1989

2.62 Lilias Skene was a leading seventeenth-century Quaker minister in Aberdeen. She publicly opposed the persecutors of the early Quaker movement in Scotland, and also expressed her experience in mystical poetry.

The darkest houre is ever nearest day;
And tryallis deep for mercies great make way,
When powers of darkness, hell, and death assaile,
When hope is gone, and human help doth faille,
The Lord is neare, his present help appears,
Gives secret strength, our doore of error cleares.

Lilias Skene, 1677

2.63 The lower God doth bring me, and the nearer to himself, the more doth this Love and Tenderness spring and spread towards the poor, simple and despised ones, who are poor in spirit, meek and lowly Suffering Lambs, and with those I choose to suffer, and do suffer, wherever they are found.

James Nayler, 1659

For other Friends' experiences of times of darkness, see 28: Growth and change.

Chapter 3:

Quaker theology

3.01 There are many names for this Divine Principle. By some, it is called the Light of Christ or the Light Within... Others call it the Revelation or Appearance of Christ, the Witness of God, the Seed of God or the Seed of the Kingdom. Still others identify it as Wisdom, the Word in the Heart, the Grace Available to All, the Spirit sent for Each Person's Benefit, the Truth Within, or the Leaven that Transforms the Lump of Humanity... But, Reader, do not be misled or confused by the diversity of terms – please remember that when you see any of these terms, it always refers to the one, unchanging Divine Principle... and although inspired writers have called it by many names, in relating its various manifestations and actions, it is one.

William Penn, 1696

Introduction

3.02 The way that Quakers think and talk about God, our theology, grows from personal and shared experience. In worship, deep listening guides us towards love and truth.

This chapter explores how Quakers understand that guidance, who or what leads us, and how we can learn from it. The chapter doesn't try to describe every Quaker belief. Its purpose is to show how Quakers do theology, inviting readers to reflect on and share their own experiences. It includes:

- Our shared experience of waiting, listening and being guided
- Concepts of God
- Quaker approaches to Christian theology

- The many sources of Quaker theology
- Our unity of practice and the importance of listening to one another
- An experience beyond words
- Being open to new light

Our shared experience of waiting, listening and being guided

3.03 Quaker theology begins with our experience of divine presence and guidance. Francis Howgill described the power of this presence among early Quakers:

> The Lord of Heaven and earth we found to be near at hand, and, as we waited upon him in pure silence, our minds out of all things, his heavenly presence appeared in our assemblies, when there was no language, tongue nor speech from any creature. The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net… We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement, and great admiration… our hearts were knit unto the Lord and one unto another in true and fervent love, in the covenant of Life with God; and that was a strong obligation or bond upon all our spirits, which united us one unto another. We met together in the unity of the Spirit, and of the bond of peace, treading down under our feet all reasoning about religion. And holy resolutions were kindled in our hearts as a fire which the Life kindled in us to serve the Lord while we had a being, and mightily did the Word of God grow amongst us, and the desires of many were after the Name of the Lord. O happy day! O blessed day! the memorial of which can never pass out of my mind. And thus the Lord, in short, did form us to be a people for his praise in our generation.
>
> Francis Howgill, 1663

3.04 This unity can be found in our meetings for worship for business as well as our meetings for worship. In these spaces, new light may break through to change our minds and take us in unexpected directions. Barbara Windle reflected on this at Britain Yearly Meeting in 2009:

> This has been an extraordinary Yearly Meeting... Above all, it has been a supreme vindication of our business method well used, our 'book of discipline' precepts actually lived out by the Friends gathering in York. We are asked every time we come to Meeting to do so with heart and mind prepared and in readiness to be open to new light, from whatever direction it may come. Time and again we saw Friends living out those difficult advices. I can't count how many people I've heard say in Meeting, or have I heard reported, or have said to me directly, something that amounted to: I have been taken to a completely new place, a new understanding, an illumination; this has enabled me to feel glad unity with the historic declaration we minuted on Friday, making our commitment to hold same-sex marriages.
>
> Barbara Windle, 2009

For more on meetings for worship for business, see 8: How Quakers make decisions. For more on Yearly Meeting, see 12: Quaker meeting structures in Britain.

3.05 Divine guidance may be experienced in many ways. The first of the two following extracts describes receiving comfort and insight from a personal, feminine Divine, inspired by Psalm 23. The second shows how Quaker worship can bring appreciation, connection and transcendence without religious belief.

3.06 She is my guide so I need nothing more
She makes me lie down in green pastures
She leads me beside still waters
She restores my soul
She leads me in the paths of wholeness, the paths she creates.

Even though I'm scared of the dark, I know no fear
For she is with me
Her strength and her courage they comfort me.
She encourages me to approach those people I don't understand
And when she shows me her way
Then I do understand
I hope her example will be with me all the days of my life
And I shall dwell in her light forever.

Quaker Women's Group, 1986

3.07 I found that worshipping with Friends would often return me to that spiritual – albeit now godless – place of my childhood bliss – the transcendence, the ability to disconnect from self and become one with the whole...

With the Friends I have found my own 'gift'. It is not the gift of faith, but a practice of peace and service and the spiritual wholeness that comes from mindfulness, from looking within, from an appreciation of every living moment and from my connection with others. I find this gift to be unconnected to the concept of deity. It is, frankly, more than enough in and of itself.

Anne Filiaci, 2006

Concepts of God

3.08 For some Friends, God is a personal, guiding presence. For others, the concept of God speaks of awe, mystery, or the sacredness of life. Quakers might have similar kinds of experience while using very different language to describe it.

3.09 We come back once again to the deep still places at the centre of our being, where we are alone, and yet not alone, for we are compassed about and caught up in so great a cloud of witnesses. It is the most human of all human experiences, and at the same time the experience that cries aloud for a religious interpretation.

Today, and throughout its history, the Society of Friends has felt constrained to interpret this experience, always with flexibility and freedom, as an encounter with the spirit of love, and truth and light, for which the only adequate name available is the name God. We did not drag God in – he was there all the time.

George Gorman, 1973

3.10 The Truth is one and the same always, and though ages and generations pass away, and one generation goes and another comes, yet the word and power and spirit of the living God endures for ever, and is the same and never changes.

Margaret Fell, 1710

3.11 Spirit... is the best word there is to express the essential nature of God. It signifies that He is not to be confused with matter nor to be found in a framework of space. He is like that highest, purest inner nature in ourselves which we call 'spirit'. He is intelligent, He is purposeful. He is devoted to the realisation of the good. He is what we are trying to be. And wherever in the universe the good is being achieved, wherever truth is triumphing, wherever holiness is making its power known – there is Spirit, there is God.

Rufus M Jones, 1923

3.12 God can also be understood as an image for aspects of human life. Philip Gross, a poet, has written about an understanding of God that stays close to his own experience:

For artists, making up isn't *making up*; in whatever terms you choose, it is relationship. If I say God is a metaphor, I don't mean a figure in an allegory, made to stand for the thing we know it stands for. I mean an image, found or 'given', with a deep life of its own, with resonances as yet undisclosed, maybe inexhaustible.

Philip Gross, 2006

3.13 The concept of God may also be a way of pointing to the mystery of reality, without needing a fixed definition.

3.14 Reality is finally mysterious. Our little word 'God' tries to name that mystery... It points but it does not describe. It offers no concepts or images that enable us to grasp the reality in our minds. It can only invite us to look and to see for ourselves...

We are not referring to a particular being that we could imagine or describe, but to whatever reality it might be that lies behind or beneath all the particular realities we know of... So 'God' in this sense is not an intellectual idea, an hypothesis, that answers a query about how the world works, or how the world began. It is a spiritual idea that answers our own inner longing for reality, our deep personal need for meaning and security and identity, which nothing else – nothing in the world around us – seems to be able to answer.

Rex Ambler, 2013

3.15 Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.

Ystyriwch, Gyfeillion annwyl, gymhellion cariad a gwirionedd yn eich calonnau. Ymddiriedwch ynddynt fel arweiniad Duw, Goleuni yr hwn sy'n dangos i ni ein tywyllwch gan ein dwyn i fywyd newydd.

Advices & queries / Cynghorion a holiadau 1, 1994

And then, of course, there's the difficult question: what is God, anyway? Ask two Quakers that question and you'll get three different answers. Many, like me, will hedge our bets and mutter something non-committal. I don't know what God is. I grew up believing in a very specific kind of personified God, and these days it's a lot vaguer and I'm still trying to figure out what it is I really

believe. But sometimes I think this passage is the closest I get to understanding it: the promptings of love and truth. Maybe that's what God is, at essence.

Finn Longman, 2020

3.16 The word 'God' is a kind of shorthand,
Not for an external being
Who looks on and manipulates, saying
'You and you and you
Will do this, that or the other.'
But 'God' is a kind of shorthand
For an inner reality of love
To which we all belong
By virtue of our humanity.
We are drawn to each other –
Those who seek, those who are finding,
Those who have something to give each other –
We are drawn to each other
Through accidents, through coincidences,
Through deliberate search,
To a love that binds us together
Which in shorthand we call 'God'.
Worship is the acknowledgement of this love –
Particular and universal.
Service is our response.

Rosemary May Wells, 2019

Quaker approaches to Christian theology

3.17 The first Quakers believed they had rediscovered the original Christian experience of the 'Inward Christ'. This guiding and transforming presence is available to everyone, and it is the same Spirit that inspired the Hebrew prophets, the apostles, and the early Christians.

3.18 Now the Lord God has opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the Light of Life, and became the children of it, but they that hated it and did not believe in it were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light, without the help of any man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures, though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. For I saw in that Light and Spirit, which was before Scripture was given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth, that all must come to that Spirit, if they would know God or Christ or the Scriptures aright, which they that gave them forth were led and taught by.

George Fox, 1648

3.19 We misunderstand the truth of the Inward Light if we imagine that it means a present inspiration independent of the past. Fox claimed that he had a word from the Lord as sure as any of the Apostles ever had. We join him in affirming our faith in the contemporary inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But Fox could never have made his claim if he had not recognised the word of the Lord which came to the Apostles.

H G Wood, 1951

3.20 Elizabeth Bathurst, writing in 1679, described what she found to be the heart of Christianity:

> Christianity doth not consist in the belief of so many doctrines, articles and principles (as some suppose) but in conformity unto that one eternal principle, to wit, the Light of Christ manifest in the conscience, and yet leads into a heavenly order, both in doctrine, principle and conversation, according to the diversity of its gifts, whereby man comes not to be at liberty in his own

will, but bound again to God, which is the true signification of the word religion.

Elizabeth Bathurst, 1679

3.21 The priesthood of all believers is a foundation of our understanding of the church. Our own experience leads us to affirm that the church can be so ordered that the guidance of the Holy Spirit can be known and followed without the need for a separated [professional] clergy.

London Yearly Meeting, 1985

3.22 This experiential understanding of Christianity is still central for many Quakers today, as the following quotations show.

3.23 The central perceptions of Christianity remain as a source of perennial wisdom without which we sink into non-life. Incarnation, the cross, repentance, forgiveness, resurrection – these unfashionable words express the deep realities of the human condition... When we read George Fox and are shaken by a power and a passion which we apparently have lost, what we should seek is not an impossible return to the historical moment which fostered such convictions but to see in the terms of our own very different, though also chaotic, times what the centrality of Christ can mean to us now.

Lorna M Marsden, 1985

3.24 As a Quaker-shaped Christian, I want to be like Mary. I aspire to honor the seed of Christ within myself and others, and birth God into the world. I hope I can faithfully listen to the Spirit speaking to me through the words of others, and speak prophetic words when they are given to me. I want to conspire with God to usher in and embody God's Kingdom, in solidarity with the crucified and ready for the Spirit of Life to rush in and make everything new.

Mark Russ, 2022

3.25 At the centre of Christianity is the figure of Jesus. Quakers respond to him in many ways. The following reflections explore some of these responses.

3.26 Though my sense of the Divine is in the infinite and inexplicable, I see in the life, teaching and death of Jesus a reflection of God which enables me to trust that I may also find God near and in the everyday. Hence I have become confident that not a sparrow falls to the ground but it is known and loved, that there is not a single human failing that is not redeemable, or a joy or grief that is not comprehended in the nature of God. I conclude that the nature of God is to offer us a creative part in the universe. This is a God of attachment to all people, to the earth and to justice, and that has huge political and social significance for the way I should lead my life. Above all, I find, in the words of Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, 'the transcendent is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any situation'. The God I encounter through Jesus tells me I shall meet God as much in my action as in my waiting or worship. The way is costly. The only power I may use is love.

Anonymous, 2008

3.27 I decided long ago that God was not the most 'powerful' thing in the universe. He much more resembles a barefoot Galilean prophet speaking in up-country dialect, followed by tax-gatherers, fishermen and prostitutes, who becomes a nuisance and ends up (very properly) by being crucified while the guards dice for his clothes – more to pass the time than because the garments are worth anything. It is not because God is powerful that I worship him; if he is powerful it is in some dimension that I don't know anything about, which we can agree (if you like) to call eternity...

No, the moment when I love God is at the moment when the Galilean prophet was watching his followers melt away and suspected that Simon Peter the fisherman would soon be off too, back to his nets. 'Wilt thou also go away?' he asks Simon; but

mercifully Simon is too stupid to see the point of the question, or to take his chance to get out. 'Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the word of eternal life.' That's it, the obscure, futile, shaky thing, as feeble as a baby in a stable, that's what I worship.

J Ormerod Greenwood, 1973

3.28 I can identify with Jesus, a man of deep commitment and with a revolutionary strategy, who gathered together a disciplined people in his effort to share with them his vision of the beloved community, of the Kingdom of God, freed from the barriers of race, clan or creed.

I can identify with Jesus the revolutionary who was put to death on a cross because he proved to be a threat to the existing social order, as he sought to remove the barriers which separated Jews from Gentiles, the taxpayer from the fisherman.

As I identify with Jesus the revolutionary, and with the historical circumstances of his human life, I see an example of a personal encounter through which God makes himself known.

Barrington Dunbar, 1970

3.29 There is a moment in Jesus' life that haunts me, and which I feel that I have absorbed at quite a discomforting level. It is recounted in three of the four gospels. In the garden of Gethsemane, before he is arrested, he tells his followers to stay where they are, because he wants to go and pray quietly on his own. He asks God to 'take this cup from me', but then adds, 'not my will but yours'. When he returns, he finds his disciples asleep. 'Could you not stay awake for one hour?' he asks. And in two of the gospels, he prays again and they fall asleep again – twice more – as if to emphasise the lassitude, inertia and grief which have beset the followers of Jesus.

It is a continual, nagging reminder to me, a symbol of the need to stand up, to be conscious and to make sure that the inside of me is always the same as the outside. And the lesson is made all the

more powerful by being drawn from the real life of a man whose truth shines out despite the theology. You couldn't invent Jesus.

Anonymous, 2008

3.30 We can respond to the Christ-event in such a way that we see Jesus as a symbol of God, a concrete example of divine being and action. When we do this, though we make statements focused on Jesus, we are in fact trying to talk about God. Using this symbol we can talk about God as helpless and humble, sharing human vulnerability with us. We can see the brokenness of God, the giving up of power in order to take on pain and mortality; the creativity of love which remakes hope out of despair, promise out of sin; the incarnation of the divine in the human, making all of life sacred; the fusion of holiness with life; the divine self-offering. Using this symbol we can talk about comfort; about the light that shines in the darkness; about the certainty of love and joy. We can see the presence of God in every aspect of our lives, so that whatever our situation it is shared and understood. Using this symbol we can above all see God in our fellow-humans and thus be called to service. In every homeless child, every refugee, every criminal or outcast, every worker or preacher, those in authority and those without it, there is a child of God, one who is precious and loved.

Janet Scott, 1980

3.31 *Christ* is a word burdened with meanings and understandings, burdened with belief systems, doubts and disbelief. Laden with questions. It is a central word in Christian history: clothed in dogma, interpretations, concepts, significance and power – *Christ* made synonymous with the man Jesus. *Christ* is a title given to the one that is touched from the deep within.

Words are symbols; their meaning lies within, and I need to crack open the shell to find the kernel. To me *Christ* means the anointed one, *the* one touched by *God*, or better: touched in the deepest within, touched by the mystery, touched by that which has no name

or form. I believe we can all open ourselves to experience this touch; we need not give it a name, but we can call it *Christ*.

Be still, clear away the clutter, open up to the inner chamber, the rare place, trust it – it is safe. Drop out of your rational, sensory self to the still place. This is where the touch happens in the rare place of the moment now.

Roswitha Jarman, 2017

The many sources of Quaker theology

3.32 Many Quakers today come from other faith traditions or identify with more than one. Some find that other traditions enhance their experience of Quaker practice:

Recognizing your True Nature in Zen and coming to a decision through Quaker process are both exercises in understanding our egos and, ultimately, easing our suffering by releasing them. This is a transformative experience that Quakerism and Buddhism offer.

Peter Taylor, 2016

3.33 Quakers today explore many spiritual and related paths, including universalism, nontheism, paganism, psychology, feminism, and other diverse approaches:

As a Quaker and a woman, it has always felt that the relationships between people are a spiritual matter... In due course, I looked at the possibility of a world in which there was Goddess. It was a pagan world, not a patriarchal monotheistic world. It was visionary, and fraught with complications. Historically valid? Can't say. Fair to men? I didn't want to ask the question. Fit for purpose as a way of mending things from the point where we are now? I doubt it. But it was elemental, free of greed, earth-cherishing. I went to its gatherings – at Glastonbury, where else? then in Cornwall – for more than ten years. It still informs my spiritual life, and will do till I

die. I don't think it will ever go mainstream. For one thing, there isn't time for any huge philosophical and political change before climate change enforces change of a more haphazard and destructive kind...

Meanwhile, I tread a faithful Quaker path, and minister occasionally about the Goddess. I'm in a local Quaker discussion group – unusually, composed of more men than women – where, sometimes, they say, 'Oh, you'll like this, Alison', and quote something pagan or goddess worshipping. I love that.

Alison Leonard, 1986

3.34 These differences can cause tensions, but Quaker theology includes an understanding of the value of different beliefs and perspectives. The Spirit leads us towards unity and mutual understanding, not conformity.

3.35 For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in him, and that he walks in his rank, in his own order, in his proper way and place of subjection to that; and this is far more pleasing to me than if he walked just in that track wherein I walk.

Isaac Penington, 1660

3.36 There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren.

John Woolman, 1762

3.37 From the beginning the Quaker Christian faith has had a universal dimension. George Fox saw the Light 'shine through all' and he identified it with the divine Light of Christ that 'enlightens every

man that comes into the world' (John 1:9). He pointed out, as did William Penn in greater detail, that individuals who had lived before the Christian era or outside Christendom and had no knowledge of the Bible story, had responded to a divine principle within them. In these terms, all Quaker Christians are universalists. Obedience to the Light within, however that may be described, is the real test of faithful living.

Alastair Heron, Ralph Hetherington and Joseph Pickvance, 1994

See also 24: Quakers and other faith communities.

Our unity of practice and the importance of listening to one another

3.38 After working together for some time, a group of Friends with widely different beliefs discerned a statement on how the Quaker community can be united in diversity. It says, in part:

We agree that the Religious Society of Friends is a community centred on the practice of waiting, listening meeting for worship. We agree that differences of understanding about what it is we listen to or worship do not prevent us from practising meeting for worship together.

We agree that the community can benefit from the presence of a diversity of spiritual paths. We have used the image of a caravan travelling together through the desert – some in the centre, carrying luggage and supplies; others scouting the way or exploring nearby routes; all visibly travelling as part of the same body. Open and honest discussion of our understandings and the things that help and harm us has brought the group closer; and we have found that it is better to be direct rather than evasive about our difference. In particular, we have become clearer that labels people claim for themselves can sometimes be helpful, although they are not always

necessary, while labels applied to other people can be hurtful and misleading. We have heard that in general 'nontheist' is a label people claim for themselves, while 'theist' is applied by others to those who are not nontheists.

The use of binary pairs of terms or opposing categories seems to us to misrepresent a much more complex situation. Within our Society, there is a kaleidoscope of experiences and expressions... To reduce this marvellous collection of shifting shapes and colours to a simplistic 'black and white' model of two positive positions is to lose or disguise much that is potentially enriching...

Our experience as a group is that we can be helped and at times transformed by deep listening to one another. Even where we continue to disagree, which we certainly do, we have been able to understand one another better through listening, and ourselves better through the challenges others provide.

Theology Think Tank of the
Revision Preparation Group, 2017

3.39 Beyond our different words and understandings, we can share a reality that guides us and brings us together.

3.40 I have been greatly helped to an inclusive understanding of Quaker worship by these words of Buddhist teacher Kevin Griffin: 'It's not important how we understand God, but rather that we have a sense of that which is greater than us, the wonder of creation, of consciousness; the miracle of the loving heart, of the innocent child; the joy of exploring the inner life; the marvel of engaging with the world.' As Friends we wait expectantly upon an essentially mysterious Reality, which is greater than us, trusting it will guide us – both in our personal lives and collectively as a faith community. While we allow one another considerable freedom in how we may imagine this greater power, and recognise that no words or image can ever adequately express its nature, both Quaker tradition and our personal experience testify to its reality...

What is important is the way we draw on this sense of a greater power underlying our faith – through commitment to spiritual growth, to self-forgetting and self-transcendence expressed as witness in the world.

Alex Wildwood, 2009

3.41 Quakers know that something – God, the Light, the Spirit, whatever you call it – is available to everyone, within ourselves, and offers us guidance when we are able to accept it.

Quakers know that the kingdom of God – the Divine Commonwealth, heaven on earth, whatever you call it – is a place of peace, a place of equality and justice, and a place of love.

Quakers know that listening to this guidance, attending to the Light Within and following where it calls us, is difficult but can be learned with practice... the fact of the difficulty itself, and that we need other people around us to help us hear the Light, is part of what we know.

Quakers know that connection and relationship are central to the spiritual life. Quakers know that meeting – as in 'meeting for worship' – is vital and that although individual and solitary prayer and other practices can also be important, we are more likely to find the voice of God speaking to us when we are working with a group who all aim to hear God into speech.

Rhiannon Grant, 2021

An experience beyond words

3.42 And the end of words is to bring men to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter. So, learn of the Lord to make a right use of the Scriptures: which is by esteeming them in their right place, and prizing that above them which is above them.

Isaac Penington

3.43 We use different words to describe our experience of the Divine, although words can never fully express it. Each of us understands and experiences this mystery in our own way, shaped by our backgrounds and personal journeys.

3.44 What then is [our] message? Words can but imperfectly express it, for life cannot be imprisoned in language; the sincerest statement of belief is but an incomplete expression of truths which our spirits may realise, but which the mind can never wholly compass. Our message can only be handed on from life to life; yet we must endeavour to set forth in language the truth which we feel to flow through the very veins of our being.

London Yearly Meeting, 1907

3.45 I sense there's a knowing deep down of something which connects us all, a sense of oneness that I feel has always been there – a sense of goodness, a great mystery which I cannot understand. I sense it most in stillness when I let go of sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, thinking. Who am I then? I also sense it in nature when the separation between me and the natural world dissolves. The moment seems complete and full, and I disappear – nothing to believe; an experience that changes perception. It's only in coming out of this experience that the thinking mind creates an interpretation that narrows it down into beliefs. Words are not reality, merely a description of reality, and we all perceive differently as we are all unique. Why not celebrate our descriptions, our beliefs, as interpretations of our experience that is [*sic*] beyond description?... The mystery that is Being, or whatever other name we make up for it – maybe no name at all, but a change in our perception of the world and who we are?

Alex Thomson, 2020

3.46 I do believe that there is a power which is divine, creative and loving, though we can often only describe it with the

images and symbols that rise from our particular experiences and those of our communities. This power is part and parcel of all things, human, animal, indeed of all that lives. Its story is greater than any one cultural version of it and yet it is embodied in all stories, in all traditions. It is a power that paradoxically needs the human response. Like us it is energised by the reciprocity of love.

It wills our redemption, longs for us to turn to it. It does not create heaven and hell for us, but allows us to do that for ourselves. Such is the terrible vulnerability of love.

Harvey Gillman, 1988

Being open to new light



3.47 The Society of Friends might be thought of as a prism through which the Divine Light passes, to become visible in a spectrum of many colours; many more, in their richness, than words alone can express.

Christian faith and practice, 1959

3.48 Seeking greater spiritual insight is a continuing journey. Our understanding of the Divine may change throughout our lives. We know that the Spirit continues to act among us, bringing new insights to individuals and the community.

3.49 Creeds are milestones, doctrines are interpretations: Truth, as George Fox was continually asserting, is a seed with the power of growth, not a fixed crystal, be its facets never so beautiful.

John Wilhelm Rowntree, 1904

3.50 We gather truth through our senses, our reason and intellect, our intuition and our experience, and it is always fashioned by the age, society and culture that we are born into. In that sense it is always developing, yet still we tend to think of truth as the end product of a journey of discovery. This assumes a line of 'progress' that may wander about circuitously but ultimately reaches an absolute reality beyond which it cannot go.

But what if truth is not linear, with a beginning and an end, but circular? What if truth is not absolute, but eternally provisional? Could 'The Truth' be a living, dynamic entity, forever changing because it is forever interacting with itself and us? The Truth-God may not be absolute or ultimate, but an evolving reality ceaselessly being reborn as it connects and reconnects with forms, ideas, possibilities, matter and spirit.

Carolyn Fletcher, 2022

3.51 The advice to be open to new light from wherever it may come is one of the reasons why the Quakers have continued to answer that of God in everyone. The trust they showed in the living Christ was their strength 300 years ago, as it is today, though we do not all use the same words. A living truth, if it is to stay alive, must speak to the conditions of the times. Once it is tied up in concise terms, bound by the words used and thought to be the last word, it is already on the decline. Life means growth – and death. We should not cling to words that have lost their life. We cannot force ourselves to believe something which does not ring true for us. Christianity used to survive because of the empty tomb; now Christianity survives in spite of the empty tomb. Great truths survive throughout history, clad in the clothes that are right for the times. A change of garb is inevitable if the truth is to be acceptable. But it is only in the trappings – the bare naked truth remains for all to feel, to acknowledge and express.

Jean West, 1988

3.52 It is because the learning process is continued throughout life that Friends are seekers as well as finders – not one or the other, but both. One only has to think of the need for a continual search for fresh language, unsoiled by use, to know that we must, if we care about truth, continue to be seekers. We may have a firm hold on old truth ourselves, but unless we are eager to find new ways of expressing it we may be unable to speak the word of life to others just when they most need it.

Ruth Fawell, 1987

3.53 In my experience it is not possible to engage fully with the world without a growing understanding of spirituality. Yes, we can run from God, but we cannot run away. If we do, we're like the two fleas on the back of a collie. One day the first turns to the second and says, 'You know, I don't think that I believe in the dog any more.'

Such is our relationship to God... We are, as Jesus said, all branches on the vine of life; as St Paul says, 'members of one another' in the Body of Christ. I'm expressing these things in a Christian framework because that's what's most relevant to where I'm digging from culturally. But equally, the same thing can be said from within any faith based on love: we are also all parts of the 'Body of Islam'; expressions of the 'Buddha nature'; children of the Goddess, or, in the Sanskrit of Hinduism, Tat tvam asi – 'That thou art' – meaning individual soul (Atman) is ultimately at one with universal soul (Brahma).

Alistair McIntosh, 2004

3.54 During one of the very first Meetings for Worship that I attended, I became aware of the close presence of God, a stillness and nearness which left me feeling entirely accepted. Then, in the peaceful, (self-?) satisfied silence of my mind and spirit, a small voice spoke: 'Good then. You have experienced God. Now what are you going to do about it?'...

Reach out to God and God – whoever, whatever, wherever God is – will reach out to you. This process is something that will occur through the whole of our lives and beyond. If God is the 'great I am', no matter what faith you subscribe to, this leads me to argue that God by God's very nature will in many ways remain infinite and unknown. It is alright to know what you know of God as well as to acknowledge that there are things you do not know. To continue that changing conversation with yourself, with others and with God is a precious, vital state to be in.

Anonymous

3.55 Wrth roi pwyslais ar y Goleuni Oddimewn nid ydym yn dyneiddio crefydd yn ormodol. Nid ein goleuni ni ydyw; ei dderbyn yr ydym ni. A ni ynghanol ein profiadau gyda'n cyd-ddynion, daw rhyw oleuni sydd yn peri i'r profiadau hynny edrych yn wahanol. Dywedwn, yn drwsgl, mai'r Goleuni Oddimewn sydd yn peri'r

cyfnewidiad, a chredwn mai oddi wrth Dduw y daeth. Sut y gwyddom nad ydym yn ein twyllo ein hunain? Yn y pen draw nid oes gennym ddim ond ein profiad ein hunain i bwyso arno. Yn y pen draw nid oes gan un a dderbynio'r grefydd fwyaf traddodiadol ddim ond ei brofiad i bwyso arno.

By emphasising the Inner Light, we do not humanise religion too much. It is not our light – we receive it. As we are in the midst of experiences with our fellow beings, a light will come that causes those experiences to look changed. We say, in a clumsy way, that it is the Inner Light that has caused the transformation and we believe that it came from God. How do we know that we are not deceiving ourselves? In the end, we have nothing but our own experiences to rely upon. In the end, even the one who accepts the most traditional religion has nothing but his own experience to rely on.

Waldo Williams, 1956

Chapter 4:

Quaker discernment

4.01 For the people called Quakers, the foundation of all religious belief is this: God, through Christ, has placed a guide in each person to show them their duty and provided each with the ability to follow that guide.

William Penn, 1696

Introduction

4.02 Discernment is at the heart of the Quaker way. It is the practice of making decisions by opening our hearts to a source of wisdom that can guide our actions. Discernment can be used for both individual and group decision-making. In both cases we bring the same intention: to find the right course of action by listening to the Spirit and to each other. In this way, we gradually develop our ability to discern what to do. We recognise our discernment may be mistaken, so we have found ways to test it in Quaker community. Discernment is a skill to be learned, practised and tested.

This chapter describes the Quaker understanding of discernment and how we practise it individually and in community. It includes:

- The meaning of discernment
- Personal discernment
- Group discernment
- Leadings
- Meetings for clearness
- Concerns

The meaning of discernment

4.03 Quakers try to live a guided life by listening inwardly for the leadings of the Spirit. This is based on our experience that each of us has access to a source of wisdom, love and truth to guide us. With practice, we can learn to tell this wisdom apart from purely self-interested motives. Some Friends describe this experience as being guided by God or Spirit-led. Others say they listen for the promptings of love and truth in the heart. Behind these varied words is a shared Quaker practice.

Discernment includes gathering information, seeking opinions and expertise, and discussing and thinking about decisions. Above all, it involves listening to the Spirit within and among us.

4.04 Discernment is a skill to be practised. We can each become more familiar with the ways that the Spirit guides us. It is important to recognise the many impulses within us and carefully discern which are truly from the Spirit. Gradually, we develop the skill of being discerning.

We bring this personal experience into group discernment. As we commit to personal practice, our shared ability to discern grows stronger. In a group, we learn to listen for the measure of truth in others' points of view, which may be contrary to our own. Together, we seek a wider perspective that helps to bring clarity on the way forward.

Personal discernment

4.05 We don't begin religion; God begins it, knocking within, in faint promptings, in inward appeals in the silences of our hearts... For the listening to the eternal involves a silence within us, a relaxed receptivity, a listening and an expectancy directed to a still small voice within. Periods of quiet and meditation... should be a part of normal living for all who would go down into central silences which are to be found in the Heart of God.

Kathleen B Wilson, 2015

4.06 As we grow more familiar with our 'Inward Guide', we learn to recognise the subtle promptings of love and truth and the ways the Spirit speaks to us.

A first step is 'centring down'. When our inner world is crowded with noise and personal plans, it can be hard to let go and hear the quiet promptings of the Spirit. Leaving outward concerns to one side and quietening the mind and body, we turn inward, waiting and listening for guidance to emerge.

4.07 In the practice of discernment, 'listening' has many shades and levels of meaning:

> [Listening is] the widest kind of prayerful, discerning attentiveness to the Source intimated within us, evidenced through others, and discernible through the experiences of life. This kind of listening is not simply auditory. It may be visual, intuitive or visceral as well, depending on the deepest attentiveness natural to the individual.
>
> Patricia Loring, 1997

4.08 For some, this may feel like an inner sense of direction. As they turn to it, test it and rely on it, they learn to trust in the Spirit's guidance. Other people find a measure of discernment by noticing bodily sensation or 'gut feelings'. At other times, guidance may come through images or words, recalling a passage of the Bible or other spiritual writing. Personal discernment may come as a sudden flash of insight or through a deepening sense of quiet assurance in the path ahead.

Our personal discernment is often strengthened by sharing it with an experienced listener or a group that is committed to our well-being and faithfulness to the Spirit.

See also 2: Quaker spiritual experience.

Group discernment

4.09 In group discernment, Quakers come together in a shared openness to the Spirit, listening for the promptings of love and truth to guide us as a community. This way of making decisions together, sometimes called the 'Quaker business method', is essentially a meeting for worship held to discern the guidance of the Spirit on a particular issue.

In group discernment we first gather in silence and then listen carefully to everyone who is guided to speak. We practise listening for the measure of truth that is in other points of view, which may be quite different from our own. Together, these different ideas make up a tapestry from which a shared sense of direction for the whole community may become clear. We commit to letting go of our personal opinions and preferences, trusting the Spirit to lead us. This requires patience and trust in the process of discernment, and it may take time to find unity.

Our discernment is not always clear or final. It may simply reflect the best decision the group is able to reach at the time. Later reflection and testing of the decision might lead to new insights and further discernment.

Sometimes a decision may be deferred until greater clarity is reached. Other decisions can only be tested through action. Our discernment does not end once a decision is made; it continues to be tested over time. We do not measure the outcome of discernment by ordinary standards of success but by how the 'fruits of the Spirit' are revealed as they unfold.

Whenever a group of Quakers comes together to make decisions, we use this process of group discernment. Sometimes decisions are routine or minor, meaning the discernment process is simple. Nevertheless, such decisions still reflect our commitment to Spirit-led decision-making and offer opportunities to practise it. At other times, clarity may only come after a long and difficult struggle with an issue, marking a moment of growth or a radical new direction. The decision,

reached after much heart-searching, may be very different from what was first imagined, but its unity will carry a clear sense of being led by the Spirit. A faithfully discerned decision is accepted by the whole community, including those not present, because it rests on a trusted Quaker practice.

4.10 Mind the light of God in your consciences, which will show you all deceit; dwelling in it, guides out of the many things into one spirit, which cannot lie, nor deceive. Those who are guided by it, are one.

George Fox, 1650

4.11 The experience of discernment in community can be joyful as well as challenging, as recalled following a meeting for worship for business of young adult Friends:

> What a joyful experience it is to disagree with one another. Our discernment this weekend has included times when we have heard strong leadings in seemingly irreconcilable directions; and yet what has shone throughout has been the love and trust we have in one another. Even difficult to hear ministry, that which challenges and confronts both your inner thoughts and other outward ministry, is made easier to hear when you know and trust that people will be honest, passionate and true; when all know and trust that they will hear your truth and that you will hear theirs; when you know and trust that the speaker is a vessel of their own divinity, whose ministry has been tested and flows from the heart and spirit. We have shared in really difficult business, and we have loved one another through it, and will continue to love one another afterwards.
>
> When we go into business, what we're trying to achieve is not mere good decision-making; we demand from ourselves nothing less than the divinely inspired path. We don't half make life difficult for ourselves! But as one friend said, business method is

about recognising that 'all humans are flawed to some extent, and all humans have the spark of the divine within them'. Our task is to reconcile that, as best we can, and we go to that task joyfully.

Clerks' Offering, Young Friends General Meeting, 2024

For more on meetings for worship for business, see 8: How Quakers make decisions.

Leadings

4.12 When Quakers listen inwardly to the Spirit, we are often moved to act. These promptings to action, known as 'leadings', may come as a sudden call or a gradual sense of being drawn towards a particular activity, place or people. Listening to the Spirit of love and truth makes us sensitive to our deepest needs and those of the world. A leading may call us to make changes in our own lives or to serve others, but it seldom arrives with a fully formed plan. By taking the first step to put a leading into practice, we open ourselves to further guidance. As we trust and follow, the next step becomes clear.

4.13 Do not look for such great matters to begin with; but be content to be a child, and let the Father proportion out daily to thee what light, what power, what exercises, what straits, what fears, what troubles he sees fit for thee; and do thou bow before him continually in humility of heart… Thou must join in with the beginnings of life, and be exercised with the day of small things, before thou meet with the great things, wherein is the clearness and satisfaction of the soul. The rest is at noonday; but the travels begin at the breakings of day, wherein are but glimmerings or little light, wherein the discovery of good and evil are not so manifest and certain; yet there must the traveller begin and travel; and in his faithful travels… the light will break in upon him more and more.

Isaac Penington, 1665

4.14 A Friend describes experiencing a leading in meeting for worship:

> For years I've worked voluntarily with autism-related groups and with regional Health Board committees. I've seen some families face a chasm when a 'high functioning' person reaches eighteen and, without provision, slides into isolation and depression...
>
> Calls from troubled parents struggling to crack open a young adult's isolation slide into my thoughts during worship.
>
> 'There should be a social group for adults,' said the voice in my mind.
>
> 'There's no money,' said my rational, keep-your-head-down self...
>
> In worship one Sunday someone said 'God's got no hands but our hands'. My stillness had already been pierced by a thought straight out of the seventeenth century – an instruction for the earliest Friends, found regularly in their writings: 'Arise, and be doing'.
>
> Anonymous, 2014

4.15 Sometimes a leading may suggest a major life change or a risky path of service. At such times, the Quaker community can offer vital support with testing and exploring personal discernment. The Quaker practice that has been developed for this purpose is called a meeting for clearness.

Meetings for clearness

4.16 Meetings for clearness were originally part of the preparation for marriage and are sometimes still used for this purpose. However, they are also valuable for helping an individual find clarity on a complex decision or to test a significant leading.

In a meeting for clearness, a small group of Friends gathers to support someone with their discernment. Following a time of silent worship, this person explains the decision they are facing and the feelings and reasons that have guided them so far.

The group listens carefully, without giving advice or opinions, and gently asks questions to bring out anything not yet expressed. The meeting may bring to the surface doubts, hopes and anxieties, and help the individual to hear the Spirit's leading more clearly. The group does not make the decision for them but supports the person to find their own clarity.

4.17 Mary Woodward describes her experience of a meeting for clearness:

> I first came to Quakers in 2002. I applied for and was accepted into membership of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Monthly Meeting the following year. Towards the end of 2003 my life fell apart. I needed to get away from it to work out why, and how never to be in that place again.
>
> A Ffriend from Nottingham meeting suggested that I might go to Pendle Hill, the Quaker study centre in Pennsylvania. On investigation, it seemed to be calling me very strongly – but I wasn't clear how I could manage to go. I was offered a clearness meeting to help me see my way.
>
> In the meeting I outlined the things I could sort quite easily, and the things that were causing great headaches, including funding and the logistics of taking six months out of my life in England.
>
> At one point in this entanglement, the Friend taking notes of the meeting asked me a question that made everything clear. If these problems were solved, they asked, would the decision be easier? Yes, I said: it's very clear to me that Pendle Hill is where I need to be.
>
> Following that, Way opened in many unexpected and heartwarming ways. My time at Pendle Hill was transformative: what I experienced and learned there has stayed with me ever since.
>
> Mary Woodward, 2020

For guidance on holding a meeting for clearness, see the Resources.

Concerns

4.18 If a leading calls someone to a major life commitment in service to the Society or the world, their Quaker community may recognise it as a 'concern'. A concern is a spiritual call to action, entrusted first to an individual but often needing the support of a wider group. If a concern is recognised as Spirit-led, the whole Quaker community, or some Friends within it, may discern a shared calling to support and uphold it.

4.19 Testing a concern is essential for the community to discern whether it is Spirit-led and what response is needed, recognising that not every good idea is ours to act upon. A meeting for clearness will often be helpful to clarify the nature of the individual's concern:

> Achieving clarity about a concern is a particular exercise in discernment. It is a process that begins with considerable private reflection and the asking of some tough questions. Is this a desire that someone else do something or is it really a call to act oneself? Is this concern in keeping with the testimonies of the Society? Is it genuinely from God?
>
> The discernment process is not confined to solitary reflection. As a Religious Society we are more than a collection of people who meet together – we meet as we do because we believe that gathered together we are capable of greater clarity of vision. It is therefore the practice in our Society for a Friend who, after due consideration, believes that he or she has a concern, to bring it before the gathered community of Friends. This is both a further part of the testing process and an expression of our membership in a spiritual community. It is a recognition of mutual obligations: that of a Friend to test the concern against the counsel of the group and that of the group to exercise its judgment and to seek the guidance of God.
>
> *Quaker faith & practice* 13.05, 1994

4.20 When a Friend seeks to have a leading recognised as a concern, they should normally bring it to their regular Quaker community. The

concern is then tested through the same group discernment process used for other decisions. A 'threshing' process may help to explore different aspects of the concern. Usually, the concern is then considered in a meeting for worship for business, where the community discerns whether to recognise or 'unite' with it, and what further action to take.

For more on threshing meetings and meetings for worship for business, see 8: How Quakers make decisions.

4.21 Elizabeth Fry describes bringing a concern to travel in the ministry to her meeting:

> I feel fresh cause for thankfulness, in being helped through yesterday, at our Monthly Meeting, in mentioning my concern to Friends... I was unusually exercised in doing it, in appeared such a pressing matter... [when the meeting united with the concern] I have seldom experienced greater relief in any thing. I could hardly help rejoicing yesterday, with the feeling of thankfulness, that the thing was got through so much to my satisfaction and comfort. Oh, how I loved my friends, I even felt it sweet their participating with me, as I believe they did, though little was said, in what I have felt so awful [awe-inspiring] and important.
>
> Elizabeth Fry, 1813

For more on travelling in the ministry, see 9: Service in the Quaker community.

4.22 If a concern is recognised as Spirit-led, the Quaker community should discern whether it is also being led to support it. This may include practical, financial, pastoral, or other forms of support. The kind of support needed may change over time, and the concern itself may shift or evolve as new insights emerge or circumstances change.

In some cases, a Quaker community may be led to adopt the concern as a collective commitment. In this way, a shared concern may become the responsibility of everyone who belongs to the community.

Some concerns call for the support of wider Quaker bodies. In such cases, a Quaker community may forward its decision to recognise the concern to another body, with a request for the support that is needed. The Quaker body that receives this request is responsible for discerning whether and how it is led to support the concern. In each case, the aim of the process is to find the right place, people and time for the action that the Spirit has called us to.

For more on different Quaker bodies, see 12: Quaker meeting structures in Britain.

4.23 Recognising a concern does not mean the individual or community that is 'under concern' needs to take it forward alone. A concern may lend itself to work with other faith groups or secular organisations. Working with other groups may enable us to achieve more than we could alone, as well as to build relationships across different communities. There may also be opportunities to share a concern by working with other Quaker groups, including Britain Yearly Meeting.

Discerning what we are led to do, as individuals and as communities, can be emotionally and spiritually challenging. A Friend may find it difficult if their sense of concern is not recognised by their community. Friends involved in the process may feel excitement, anxiety or frustration, especially if the community struggles to reach agreement. Patient and open-minded listening will be important, as everyone involved works through the complexities of a situation. Sensitive pastoral care may be needed to support the community and to engage constructively with potential conflict.

See also 16: Conflict in Quaker communities.

4.24 A concern is not always permanent. It may be clear when a concern has run its course. An activity might be completed, or a goal may have been achieved. At other times the expected end may be less clearly defined. There may come a time to pass the concern on to others, or to lay it down and make space for new activities. As at other

key moments in the life of the concern, a meeting for clearness or other appropriate discernment process can help to clarify when its end has been reached.

4.25 When the Life is exhausted, when the charge is fulfilled, when the burden is discharged, we can say with George Fox, 'I am clear of it'. We can lay it down and await the next thing, confident that God's work goes on.

Patricia Loring, 1997

For more guidance on Quaker concerns, see the Resources.

Chapter 5:

Quaker testimony

5.01 Testimony is an outward physical sign of an inward spiritual experience. It is the fruit of the Spirit breaking into the particularities of our lives. Our lived testimony communicates something about the truth that has been revealed to us.

Rachel Muers, 2020

Introduction

5.02 Quaker testimony is the whole way of life that testifies to our experience of God. It is how we are called to live in faithfulness to God's purposes. Our testimony is the message we communicate with our lives. The whole Quaker community is called to share it with the world, in actions as well as in words.

This chapter explores the role and importance of Quaker testimony. It includes:

- What Quakers mean by testimony
- Testimony and testimonies
- How testimony changes over time
- Quaker testimony today

What Quakers mean by testimony

5.03 The word 'testimony' is used by Quakers to describe a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life. It is not a form of words, but a mode of life based on the realisation that there is that of God in everybody, that all

human beings are equal, that all life is interconnected. It is affirmative but may lead to action that runs counter to certain practices currently accepted in society at large. Hence a pro-peace stance may become an anti-war protest, and a witness to the sacredness of human life may lead to protests against capital punishment. These testimonies reflect the corporate beliefs of the Society, however much individual Quakers may interpret them differently according to their own light. They are not optional extras, but fruits that grow from the very tree of faith.

Harvey Gillman, 1988

Quaker testimony is a response to God's leadings

5.04 Quakers know from collective experience that we can live under the guidance of God, as individuals and communities. Our experience of God can show us our shortcomings. It can also reveal how we and the world need to change to live in wholeness and peace. This experience of being called to transformation finds expression as Quaker testimony.

Quaker testimony is action

5.05 Testimony is not just a statement about what is wrong with the world, or a list of values. Our testimony is what we do as well as how we explain it to each other and to society more broadly. If we are faithful to God's leadings to action, our lives will speak.

Quaker testimony is a challenge to the world

5.06 Our testimony is often a challenge to the society around us. When society's laws or customs go against God's vision for a flourishing world, our testimony is a call for change. This may bring us into conflict with those in power.

Quaker testimony is discerned in community

5.07 Each of us expresses our testimony in our own lives, but our collective Quaker testimony is what we have discerned together over time and across Britain Yearly Meeting. Our shared testimony can challenge each of us to be more faithful to God's guidance.

Testimony and testimonies

5.08 Testimony is our whole response to the guidance and transformation we experience in worship. The various kinds of action we are called to as individuals and as a community, such as opposing war and challenging inequality, are often called 'testimonies'.

Quaker testimony has always taken many forms, including truthful speech, avoiding gambling, refusing oaths, opposing war and slavery, defending the rights of prisoners and conscientious objectors, and supporting refugees. These diverse aspects of Quaker testimony were first grouped together as 'testimonies' in the mid-twentieth century, under themes such as simplicity, equality and peace, to make them easier to remember and explain.

This kind of classification can be a helpful aid to memory. It can also be misleading if it suggests that testimonies are unconnected to each other, or just values or principles. Testimonies are actions in response to specific leadings. They cannot be reduced to a list of words or general principles.

5.09 To attempt to turn the testimonies into principles is to disregard the specificity of the concerns and leadings that are laid on us as particular individuals. It is also to create a set of ethical demands for action in the world that is impossible for any individual or organization to live up to. These demands in turn create a constant anxiety that is contrary to the peace of God given us when we are faithful to specific tasks given us as individual people or meetings.

Patricia Loring, 1997

How testimony changes over time

5.10 [Early Friends] testified to the truth that had changed them by living their lives on the basis of that truth. The reality of their life (and of human life) shone through in their lives because they were open to that reality and lived in harmony with it. Lives lived in the truth would then resonate with how other people lived their lives, and more specifically with the deep sense within them that they were not living well, not living rightly. When Friends spoke honestly and truthfully to people, when they dealt with them as they really were, without pretence or projection, when they met violence with nonviolence and hatred with love, people knew at some level they were being confronted with the truth, whether they liked it or not.

Rex Ambler, 2008

5.11 Early Friends' testimony was a specific challenge to the social hierarchy and institutions of seventeenth-century England. For the first Quakers, the most important testimonies were plain and truthful speech, refusing to pay tithes to the established church, and refusing to swear oaths in court. Most early Friends also refused to bear arms, participate in war or trade in materials useful for the military.

The actions recognised as part of Quaker testimony have constantly evolved, in response to changing social conditions and new discernment in the Quaker community. We no longer recognise some early testimonies as Spirit-led, such as early Friends' rejection of music and the arts. We have found that God continues to reveal new light and calls us to respond in each generation.

For more on the testimony of early Friends, see 29: Quaker history.

Quaker testimony today

5.12 Quakerism is not a spirituality of passivity, nor a spirituality of options; our testimonies are not a pre-packaged set of values. Our

spiritual experience, our openness to being led and living a guided life, leads us to a life we have little choice over. Testimony is the outflowing life we cannot help but lead.

Ben Pink Dandelion, 2014

5.13 Our Quaker testimony today includes all the guidance that we have discerned together as Britain Yearly Meeting and continue to recognise as true leadings. This includes traditional testimonies such as the rejection of violence, commitment to peacemaking, speaking truthfully, avoiding gambling or speculation, and integrity in how we use our time and money.

Other areas of Quaker testimony have emerged more recently, in response to growing awareness of historical injustices as well as new social and environmental crises. These include anti-racism, reparations for slavery and colonialism, protecting the right to peaceful protest, championing equal marriage, climate justice, and the commitment to becoming a low-carbon community. New areas of Quaker testimony will continue to emerge as long as we are open to God's guidance and willing to be faithful, even at the risk of being unpopular or challenging those in power.

5.14 I think a good question to ask might be: what would make us, as Friends, really unpopular today? As Quakers, it seems to me that we need to be a constant disturbance in society. We need to be a troubling people. Maybe we are called to do just that. We need to listen to God, and then act according to his Word, or, if you prefer, to what our conscience demands.

Tom Shakespeare, 2020

5.15 The first Friends had an apocalyptic vision of the world transformed by Christ and they set about to make it come true. The present generation of Quakers shares this conviction of the power of the spirit, but it is doubtful whether it will transform the world in our lifetime, or in that of our children or children's children. For us it is not so important when the perfect world will be achieved or

what it will be like. What matters is living our lives in the power of love and not worrying too much about the results. In doing this, the means become part of the end. Hence we lose the sense of helplessness and futility in the face of the world's crushing problems. We also lose the craving for success, always focusing on the goal to the exclusion of the way of getting there. We must literally not take too much thought for the morrow but throw ourselves whole-heartedly into the present. That is the beauty of the way of love; it cannot be planned and its end cannot be foretold.

Wolf Mendl, 1974

For more on Quaker testimony today, see C: Our Quaker faith in action.

Part B:

Our Quaker community

Introduction

B.01 In a Quaker community we are enabled to worship together, discern our leadings, care for each other, witness together, and welcome newcomers. Our communities take many forms, including local and area meetings, online gatherings, and shared experiences such as camps, residentials and youth events.

Being a Quaker is more than holding personal beliefs or values. It means belonging to a gathered and guided community of mutual care, responsibility and accountability. As we share our lives in community, we affirm the life of the Spirit within each person and are shaped together into a faithful people.

B.02 The chapters in this part of the book describe how, as Quakers, we understand and organise our communities, make decisions together and care for each other.

Chapter 6 – The meaning of Quaker community describes what community means to Quakers and our place within it. This includes recognising each other's gifts, discerning and taking action together, and coming to know each other more deeply as all-age communities.

Chapter 7 – Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities describes Friends' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Quaker community. It explores the value of diversity within our communities, how our needs can differ, and the value of listening to and understanding each other across our differences.

Chapter 8 – How Quakers make decisions builds on Quaker discernment by more deeply exploring our practices for discerning together, including the discipline of our meetings for worship for business and the use of threshing meetings to prepare for decision-making.

Chapter 9 – Service in the Quaker community describes the kinds of service that Friends may be led to offer in a Quaker community, and some of the ways we use our gifts to minister to each other.

Chapter 10 – Spiritual and pastoral care describes how Friends care for each other's spiritual and practical needs in Quaker communities. It includes the roles of elders and pastoral carers in nurturing our spiritual lives and relationships.

Chapter 11 – Nominations explains how we choose people to serve within our communities. It describes how we aim to appoint people to Quaker roles in a way that builds up community, uses everyone's gifts and shares responsibility widely.

Chapter 12 – Quaker meeting structures in Britain describes how we act together as Quakers at the local, regional and national levels. It explains the structures that link us together and express our mutual responsibility and accountability.

Chapter 13 – Stewardship and trusteeship explores how we use our resources to support the life and witness of our communities. It explains the relationship between the Quaker church and its charities, and the responsibilities of Quaker trustees.

Chapter 14 – Quaker marriage describes the Quaker understanding and practice of marriage, including the right holding of a Quaker wedding or celebration of commitment.

Chapter 15 – Quaker approaches to death and dying explores spiritual and practical preparation for the end of life. It describes the Quaker

practices of funerals, memorial meetings and testimonies to the grace of God in the life of a deceased Friend.

Chapter 16 – Conflict in Quaker communities explores some common sources of conflict and how conflict can also be an opportunity for growth, learning and change. It describes some approaches for working through conflict that can help strengthen our communities.

Chapter 17 – Quakers worldwide describes the diversity of the community of Quakers throughout the world and how Friends from different international traditions work together.

Chapter 18 – Membership explains our understanding of membership of Britain Yearly Meeting and our processes for becoming a member, and transferring or terminating membership.

Chapter 6:

The meaning of Quaker community

6.01 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, 1667

Introduction

6.02 In a Quaker community we are brought together by worship. In meeting for worship we open ourselves to encounter the Spirit together. As we come to know each other more deeply, we also become more open to the Spirit working through us and in us. We are called to show the same love to one another that we hope for in the world.

Living as a community, we also meet to make decisions, deal with difficulties, learn together, share our lives, and enjoy each other's company. These are all important parts of our life together as a worshipping community. In a Quaker community we can live our faith to its fullest potential.

This chapter explores what community means to Quakers. It includes:

- Developing our gifts
- Caring for each other
- Discerning together
- Taking action together
- Knowing and accepting each other

- Being an all-age community
- Welcoming newcomers

Developing our gifts

6.03 Quakers understand that we all have different Spirit-given gifts, and all are equally important. A gift can be anything that helps to nourish the community. It may be a particular talent or calling, or a need that gives others an opportunity for service.

A flourishing spiritual community is fostered through mutual sharing. Our gifts continue to unfold throughout our lives and may be different over time. The way we serve others, sometimes called our ministry, will also change as our gifts develop. The community grows and thrives as our gifts are shared and nourished.

6.04 There are many gifts in our community, and by appreciating the gifts God is giving us, we can become more willing to live adventurously.

> In a living meeting, we need elders: spiritual midwives with a sensitivity to the conditions of Friends and meetings. We need gospel ministers willing to bravely and vulnerably speak the words they are given. We need the gift of care that enables us to see more in others than they see in themselves. These gifts are given for the good of our community, so it is our responsibility to help each other deepen in them. We feel a concern to invite Friends into this deepening work.
>
> Oxford Young Adult Friends Gathering, 2025

6.05 Everyone in a Quaker community needs their different contributions to be recognised and appreciated. Our contributions may include skills, experience, knowledge, money, presence, or simply a need. Some people also contribute in a role that serves the community in a formal way.

For more on Quaker service, see 9: Service in the Quaker community and 11: Nominations.

Caring for each other

6.06 Every person, regardless of age or background, is a valuable member of the Quaker community. Everyone needs to know they are safe, valued, respected, and cared for. We all have a duty to support parents and carers who carry responsibility for children, young people, elderly Friends, and others who may need extra care.

We aim to nurture all members of our community by making sure our activities and events consider everyone's needs. It is up to all of us to ensure this happens.

Although trustees usually hold formal responsibility for safeguarding in our communities, we all have a duty to care for and protect children and others who may be at risk.

6.07 A common theme in discernment across the weekend was the care that we have for one another. We are here for our community, we help each other and rely on one another. And that's exactly what we all need.

Young Friends General Meeting, 2021

For more on how we care for each other in Quaker communities, see 10: Spiritual and pastoral care. For guidance on safeguarding, see the Resources.

Discerning together

6.08 In a Quaker community we can help each other to discern how the Spirit is leading us. When a community is in unity, we can take shared action beyond what we could achieve alone.

We should encourage everyone in the community to take part in shared discernment in our meetings for worship for business. It is important to share information well, so that everyone feels included in decision-making and can contribute fully.

In a community we hold each other accountable. This helps to protect us from individual errors of judgement and creates greater security to live in the freedom of the Spirit. A Quaker community can offer us the loving challenge to grow into greater faithfulness to the leadings of the Spirit.

6.09 We come together in community so that we can begin to reflect God's love back into the world and to each other. We need a vision of community that allows not just for loving acceptance, but also for loving challenge, growth, and transformation. Just as in our individual spiritual lives the two facets of God's love complement one another, so too in our community life both kinds of love are necessary.

> This goes to the very heart of why we gather in community in the first place. We all need to belong to a group in which we can feel acceptance and support, and that is a very valid reason why we choose to be together. But there is another reason that God calls us into community: we are people in need of transformation, and community is the place of that transformation.
>
> At its best, a Quaker Meeting is not just a collection of individual seekers, but a community of faith, a covenant community, knit together by our common seeking of God. We are like spokes on a wheel: as we draw closer to our center in God, we also draw closer to each other. And as Douglas Steere has reminded us, 'to come near to God is to change'.
>
> Thomas Gates, 2004

For more on discerning together, see 4: Quaker discernment and 8: How Quakers make decisions.

Taking action together

6.10 By worshipping together in community, we encounter the transforming power of the Spirit. Through this experience, we may be led to take action for a better world.

Being part of a community means we can act together to achieve more than we could alone. In community we can encourage each other, sustaining our hope and vision of a world transformed by the Spirit of love and truth.

6.11 God comes to us in the midst of human need, and the most pressing needs of our time demand community in response. How can I participate in a fairer distribution of resources unless I live in a community which makes it possible to consume less? How can I learn accountability unless I live in a community where my acts and their consequences are visible to all? How can I learn to share power unless I live in a community where hierarchy is unnatural? How can I take the risks which right action demands unless I belong to a community which gives support? How can I learn the sanctity of each life unless I live in a community where we can be persons not roles to one another?

Parker J Palmer, 1997

For more on taking action together, see 5: Quaker testimony and C: Our Quaker faith in action.

Knowing and accepting each other

6.12 Being in community can help us to accept our own and others' gifts and failings. By sharing each other's day-to-day joys and concerns, we gain as much as we give. In community we find frustrations as well as joy. We are encouraged to listen to those we might prefer to ignore and to care for those who are difficult to love. By working to build a loving community, we are grounded in a lived reality of care, connection and faith.

We seek to be a diverse community that welcomes all who wish to worship in the Quaker way. Sharing our lives with people of different ages and backgrounds, and with different points of view, can give us a wider perspective. Through our differences we may find surprising new insights and connections.

In community we can practise disagreeing well and working together through times of conflict and confusion. We can build mutual trust by taking the risk of speaking authentically, listening to others with an open heart, accepting differences, and being accepted.

6.13 Our vision of the truth has to be big enough to include other people's truth as well as our own. We have to learn to love difficult unlovable people. Accepting each other, and each other's relationship with God, let us continue to hold together at our deepest level. We are a forgiven community. Part of the cost of discipleship is living with the other disciples.

Beth Allen, 1984

6.14 And all Friends take heed of jars and strife, for that is it, which will eat out the Seed in you; therefore let not that harbour in your bosoms, lest it eat out the good in you, and ye come to suffer in your own particulars. Therefore dwell in love and life, and in the Power and Seed of God...

George Fox, 1656

See also 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities and 16: Conflict in Quaker communities.

Being an all-age community

6.15 Quaker communities thrive when they welcome and include all generations, including children and families of all kinds. Friendships and mutual support across generations can enrich the lives of older and younger people.

Parents and carers with young children often need the support of a multigenerational community. Young people can also benefit from supportive friendships with a wider circle of adults. We should take care

to ensure that people of all ages are included in Quaker events and in decisions that affect the life of the community.

6.16 Duncan Blackadder from Scalloway gives a 12-year-old's view of a Quaker community in Shetland:

> One thing I like about going to meeting in Shetland is that you go to lots of different people's houses. Sometimes we go to this peerie [small] chapel beside Helen and Tom's but that's not very often.
>
> Best of all is Jenni's house [at Walls]. She lives in a croft house with one room. She has a spinning wheel and a box bed, a braaly [splendid] old cooking stove with lots of doors in it. She has a long wooden seat with sheepskins and her window sills are full of flower pots. You can see the sea very near and you can hear it and hear the wind and the sea gulls and goats.
>
> Next best is Whalsay where the Dallys live because we get to go there on two long ferry crossings and you can watch sea-birds and islands and cliffs. You can see all the houses in Symbister from their house and the new leisure centre is being built next door. In 1992 we might be able to go swimming because that's when the pool is supposed to be finished.
>
> After Whalsay I like Unst best because we get to go on four ferries and I can sometimes go on the bridge. Last time I went on the bridge we saw a cargo ship and had to alter course. The crew looked through my binoculars and said that they were better than the skipper's ones. His had only one eye piece working.
>
> I like meeting in our own house because you don't have to go anywhere and you can make tea and things for other people. I like it best when Rachel comes with her two children even if they are peerie. It was good when the American children came last year and I could show them my room...
>
> I just wish that there were more children in the Quaker families up here, so I like it when we go south and go to Aberdeen or Saffron

> Walden Meetings because I can meet lots more children like Bijon and Rudi. But I still feel glad that I live in Shetland.
>
> Duncan Blackadder, 1989

6.17 Some Quaker communities also offer age-specific opportunities for children and young people. These include regional youth groups and residentials, as well as national and international Quaker events. These activities can offer formative social, spiritual and emotional experiences of Quaker community:

> I grew up as a Quaker attending many young Quaker events including local meeting, summer schools, Yearly Meeting, and other national events. Quakers have always been a huge part of my life and young Quaker events have had a strong positive impact on me during my childhood. For me, attending young Quaker events was always a much needed escape from life outside of Quakers, especially school, which was not always easy. Whenever I attended young Quaker events I knew I'd be in a safe, welcoming community, where I belonged, could be myself, was valued for who I was, and was supported no matter what.
>
> Anya Nanning Ramamurthy, 2021

Welcoming newcomers

6.18 Our communities are nourished and sustained by welcoming and including new people. Inviting and welcoming newcomers is the responsibility of everyone in the meeting, not just those who greet them as they arrive or who have formal pastoral roles. We should regularly consider how accessible our communities are, and how we can be more welcoming to newcomers.

It is important to offer newcomers opportunities to learn about the Quaker way that are appropriate to their needs. Deepening their understanding of Quaker spirituality and practice will help newcomers to feel they belong.

6.19 When I came to Quakers, over twenty years ago now, I was not looking for a community, but I found one: a nourishing and loving group of people in which I felt at home. It was also an enabling community. When I was growing up, I was led to believe that poverty and injustice were just too big to change, that there was nothing I could do. Here, I discovered people who were, in many different ways, making a difference, and they gave me the confidence to believe that, rooted in my new community, that might be true for me too.

Jennifer Kavanagh, 2021

For more on welcoming newcomers, see 25: Sharing the Quaker way.

Chapter 7:

Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities

7.01 Cofiwch fod pob un ohonom yn unigryw, yn werthfawr, yn blentyn i Dduw.

Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.

Cynghorion a holiadau / Advices & queries 22, 1994

Introduction

7.02 As Quakers, we have experienced how God draws us together in community. We aim to create communities where everyone feels welcome and can participate fully and equally. This is the heart of inclusion. When we succeed in this, our communities are attractive to a greater diversity of people. More diverse Quaker communities are enriched by wider perspectives in our worship, discernment and friendships.

Understanding people with different experiences from ours requires listening with open minds and generous hearts to what they have to say.

This chapter explores some Friends' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Quaker community, without attempting to be comprehensive. It also discusses how Quaker communities can embrace change and become more diverse and inclusive. It includes:

- The gift of diverse communities
- Where we can be more inclusive
- Our different needs

- Listening to each other
- Embracing change

The gift of diverse communities

7.03 We know that people of every background have unique gifts to share. Through learning from each other's experience, we can deepen our mutual caring, our worship and our discernment:

> If everyone has come from a similar background and tends to think in a similar way, there is a danger that this is not discernment but group think. We have a radical vision as Quakers but, unless we become more diverse, our ability to discern the way forward in enacting that radical vision will die out.
>
> Helen Minnis, 2022

7.04 A diverse community that includes people of different ages, life experiences and backgrounds enables the full revelation of God's purposes. God calls us not simply to accept others, but to rejoice in the diversity of humanity:

> The Quaker way recognises that the diversity within the community is a gift without which the community cannot function; the diversity of the many members is *necessary* for the Spirit to operate... Inspiration operating through diversity is God's way of working... The diversity in humankind, and indeed in all creation, is itself a revelation of God's presence.
>
> Timothy Peat Ashworth and Alex Wildwood, 2009

For more on discernment in community, see 4: Quaker discernment.

7.05 Becoming more inclusive means being adaptable and open to change. Sometimes changes must be made quickly, when it becomes clear we have got something wrong. We may need to keep learning to value

everyone equally, to recognise our biases and prejudices, and to accept our own imperfections as part of learning to accept others. We know that God continues to offer new light, if we are willing to risk making mistakes and humble enough to learn from them.

7.06 When I talk about inclusion, I mean the physical environment, but more than that, I mean the social and emotional space that we share together. Some of my enthusiasm and hope is for the obvious reason: I like to be able to live my own life. But it's more than that; I really believe in better spaces and structures that enable everyone to thrive. Done well, inclusion shrinks into the background so we don't notice it. Other times, it brings us moments of joy where we're aware of being upheld by the objects and people around us.

Thinking physically, all of us will at various points have luggage, be tired, be looking after children, get an injury or get older. We'll also be sad. Many of us will have a mental health condition. We might have dementia or another type of neurodivergence. Inclusion welcomes us all, in whatever state we are in, so that our state isn't the main thing we notice. Our bodies and minds will change over time. I believe that we can – should – create more spaces and ways of being: ones that not only tolerate or accept, but celebrate and cultivate all of these ways of being.

Esther Loukin, 2023

Where we can be more inclusive

Worship and discernment

7.07 We can think about how, when and where we hold our worship, including the possibilities provided online. We can listen to those who may feel excluded from decision-making in local, area and yearly meetings, and be ready to make the changes they need to be more involved.

Service

7.08 Because service builds a sense of belonging to the community, we should make sure it's not limited to a few people. Our Quaker discipline gives us the freedom to think imaginatively about how roles and responsibilities can be shared more widely.

Buildings

7.09 We can think about the buildings we use and the facilities we provide in them, for ourselves and other users. We can listen to people who need changes made for our spaces to be fully accessible and inclusive.

Pastoral care

7.10 We can try to ensure our arrangements for pastoral care are sufficient for the range of needs in our community, including those of different generations and financial circumstances.

Communication

7.11 In an inclusive community we will ask how people prefer to receive information and offer different methods to ensure it reaches everyone who needs it. Our use of language can also model awareness and respect for people's different circumstances and backgrounds.

Social and learning events

7.12 Social events play a large part in the life of a community. Not everyone will want to take part in every activity, but they should be able to. Is there a variety of events planned to cover different ages, abilities and interests? Do opportunities for learning about the Quaker way include people who have different learning needs and are at different points in their spiritual journey?

Our different needs

7.13 Lots of us have different needs, so we know it is important to think about how to be kind to one another.

Fox Cubs minute (2- to 4-year-olds),
Britain Yearly Meeting, 2019

7.14 There is a wide range of individual needs in our communities. At some point any person may need extra care to be fully included. In a diverse Quaker community, there will also be differences in social background, class, racial identity, neurodivergence, gender, sex, sexuality, age, and physical or other abilities. All these differences bring particular gifts to the community, and they may also involve specific needs.

Sometimes we have to accept that it is not possible to meet everyone's needs. There may also be conflicting needs within the community. We can, however, recognise our possibilities and limits through carefully listening to each other and bringing our challenges into collective discernment.

More inclusive arrangements are often better for everyone in the community, not just for people with specific needs. When we are trying to meet people's needs, it is important to listen to them about what would be most helpful, rather than making assumptions.

Listening to each other

7.15 Friends, where can we meet in the space between us where we recognise God to be found? Can we truly listen? Can we accompany each other through this journey of life? Can we reach out across our perceived differences and meet and listen and hear each other? We heard a call for such a practice to be made possible.

Minute 22, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2022

7.16 Change becomes possible and desirable when we understand each other's life experiences. Listening to each other is the first step to greater understanding and inclusion.

Class, wealth and education

7.17 Quakers come from many different social backgrounds and occupations. Some of us benefit from generational wealth and privileged educational opportunities, and some of us experience social exclusion and financial hardship.

7.18 I have been greatly exercised for some time by the image we like to present of ourselves (albeit with beating of breasts) as a white, middle-class, well-educated group of heterosexual people, preferably in stable marriages with children that behave in socially acceptable ways. I do feel that this is a myth. The danger of such myths is that we exclude many potential Quakers who feel they cannot/do not live up to the image or who feel that such a group is not one with which they wish to be associated. Sadly, many of us within the Society who do not fit in feel marginalised and second-class.

Another effect is that many problems faced by a large proportion of people are seen as separate: people who are poor, facing oppression, living in poor housing, experiencing prejudice are the 'others'. This enables us to be very caring but distant (and sometimes patronising) and also makes it difficult to be conscious of prejudice behind some of the normally accepted assumptions of our society/Society, such as that people who are unemployed are a different group from those who have employment; that poor people are poor… because they are not as bright or as able as the rest of us or because their limited homes did not give them the opportunities that a good Quaker home would have done; that children living in single-parent families are automatically deprived by that very fact.

Until we as a Religious Society begin to question our assumptions, until we look at the prejudices, often very deeply hidden, within our own Society, how are we going to be able to confront the inequalities within the wider society?

Susan Rooke-Matthews, 1993

7.19 I know poverty well. It has been the wallpaper of my life for most of it. I grew up with a single father who was a teacher in a time when teachers were neither well respected nor well paid. This gave me the unusual combination of a strong working-class identity and a very low tolerance for misplaced apostrophes.

I know what it is like to be emotionally abused by those who seem to enjoy emotionally abusing people they see as below them in the hierarchy they wrongly imagine governs us all. I know what it is like to approach the jobcentre with dread, my legs getting heavier with every step towards it, wondering if I have done enough to prove that I am worthy to exist for another fortnight.

I have been sanctioned and left with nothing. I remember being sent to an organisation called Working Links in Rutherglen, around three miles from where I lived. I could reclaim £4.10 for an all-day bus ticket and, bless them, they did not ask to see that ticket. So I could walk there and back, and spend that £4.10 on food and toiletries.

I have had the good fortune, in recent years, to be promoted from extreme poverty to relative poverty. I find the experience very strange when Friends speak of poverty as if it is some distant trouble – something terrible which is happening to someone else somewhere else, very, very far away. This can broadcast the unintended message: you are not welcome here. Do not assume that poverty is not in the room with you.

Alastair McIver, 2024

7.20 Groups that are too uniform in social background can make it difficult to belong for anyone who doesn't seem to fit in. They may unthinkingly treat Friends whose experience is different to the majority in a patronising or insensitive way:

> One particular study group, the Friend who took me said, 'Oh, would you mind if I mentioned that you lived in a high-rise flat at one time?' I thought, 'No. Well, why should I mind?', you know. And [when we got there] he said, 'Well, Anne has said that I may mention…' And I laughingly tried to describe that life in a high-rise flat was actually just like life anywhere else. There was this deathly quiet at the study group, and I felt, well, I couldn't possibly tell you about the other places that I've lived. The high-rise flat was definitely a step up!
>
> Spiritual Hospitality Project in Wales quoting 'Anne' (name changed), 2003

Neurodiversity

7.21 Quaker communities include a wide range of neurodiversity. Diverse ways of communicating and processing information bring important gifts to the community. Care is also needed to ensure that everyone can participate fully:

> Ideas about what makes a good 'space' for neurodivergent people are still being developed. My instinct and conclusion from my own experience is that Quaker meetings are potentially good places for many neurodivergent people to worship and to be.
>
> I see my Quaker meeting as a place of unmasking: somewhere I can go and be accepted as myself and drop the usual social norms and requirements…
>
> There is, in fact, a freedom that comes in not having that as an explicit part of my identity for an hour: to exist in a place beyond labels and identities and find a flow that is part of something wider

and deeper, where I am accepted, connected, and reflected. But it is a freedom that is made possible by the conditions that enable me to feel safe and relaxed enough to be part of it. I was lucky to have been invited in by somebody with a good intuition, but I would love many more neurodivergent people to be issued a clear invitation that tells them their needs would be recognized in Quaker meetings and that this is a movement that was founded on upholding difference and will continue to do so. Perhaps I could go so far as to say, it is a place where it is possible to be 'proudly weird'.

Kate Fox, 2025

7.22 Judging people as a problem because of their differences can obscure the unique qualities they have to offer the community:

I am now finding the strength in myself to speak out and assert – gently, I hope – that people with neurodivergency are not the difficult ones. It is the lack of understanding and awareness that creates the difficulty and offers us a challenge. Those of you who find us difficult might not have thought about how difficult we find you. So why should we be the only ones to work at finding a shared and mutual understanding? I have heard many stories of real pain and suffering caused by a lack of insight into how wonderful we are as a community. Friends have missed qualities that would enhance any Meeting if embraced appropriately.

Sylvia Clare, 2024

Disability

7.23 Ensuring that our spaces and events are accessible for people with a range of disabilities is an ongoing practice. It involves continuing to deepen our knowledge of each other and our changing needs.

7.24 In disability spaces, in disability culture, meeting people's accessibility needs is a prioritised practice. It's hard, but that's the

point. Like our testimonies, it is an active practice, not a statement. Some people, in the rest of the world, are very keen to get beyond these conversations about access, to not have them any more. I often find the spirit in these conversations, and I really enjoyed the brief interlude where most people were dipping their toe into messy imperfect access. Dealing with not having my own access needs met, at least at the initial time it happens, rarely has much spiritual practice in it for me; it distracts at best, and at worst it upsets and enrages me. Meeting other people's access needs nearly always does feel like a spiritual practice for me. I find groups – Quaker or not, who don't want to have these 'meta' conversations about what is working or not – very difficult; how can we work together if we are unable to say what's working or not for us, even and especially when other people have different, even contradictory or incompatible, experiences? Of course, we don't want that to be all or even most of what we do, but if it is none, we guarantee that some people are excluded. Accessibility is never only a disability thing; different people with the same 'disability' may have completely different ways that need is best met. Some approaches work well for some situations, and not for others.

Esther Loukin, 2023

7.25 When I get to the Meeting house, I cannot go in the front door. I go in a side entrance, and when I first arrived, the instruction was that the door would be closed, so 'bang hard and with luck someone will hear you and let you in'. That is not inclusion. The door could be open and welcoming, and although I can now let myself in, a newcomer cannot...

In Genesis, God said 'let us create humankind in our image to be like us'. If we are all created in some way as a representation of God's image, then God comes in all shapes and colours, of limb arrangements, of mental capacity, of ways of thinking, of differences in sight and hearing. It helps me to understand 'that of God in everyone'. It embodies God in my bones, my flesh and mind. I love the thought of being 'fearfully and wonderfully made' – what more could I ask, than to be fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image?...

> May Friends enable us all to come and be just exactly the way we are made to be, without judgement, respecting that we may need to do and be in different ways, in accordance with the ways in which we are individually fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God.
>
> Erica Thomas, 2024

Anti-racism

7.26 Quaker communities in Britain mostly have a large white majority, and they can sometimes feel exclusive and unwelcoming for people of other ethnicities:

> Quakerism need not be defined exclusively as white, Christian and middle-class, and such culture need not be adopted as the culture of those who are convinced. When this does happen the inequalities and unequal power dynamics of our society are reflected in our meetings and in this way Black people are discouraged from fully participating in worship.
>
> Our Society is often blind to the gifts and richness of other traditions and this cultural chauvinism impedes its development. Racism within the Society of Friends is perhaps more damaging because it is unconscious and springs from stereotyped assumptions: 'And no harm is meant by it. Harm may be done but it is never meant.'
>
> *Epistle of Black, white, Asian and mixed-heritage Friends*, 1991

7.27 Tackling racism within our communities offers the promise of a more authentic and radical Quaker spirituality and practice in the future:

> The world is more awake to racism than ever before, and many are beginning to see the links between an economic system based on racism and colonialism and the damage being done to our planet.

> ... these issues are not only for Black people to consider. Tackling racism will not only benefit people from ethnic minorities but will benefit us all. ...
>
> The way we tackle or don't tackle racism will weave, like coloured threads, through the unfolding of our Quaker spirituality into the future. What colour do we want those threads to be? Do we want the fabric of our future Society to be woven solely from the pastel shades of complacency – or do we want vivid, diverse threads of radical thought and action to be woven into our fabric, contributing to genuine change?
>
> Helen Minnis, 2022

7.28 At Britain Yearly Meeting in 2021, Quakers in Britain made a collective commitment to becoming an anti-racist community, recognising how far we still have to go to achieve this:

> Around our yearly meeting Friends have been hearing and acting on a call to tackle systemic racial injustice... As a religious society we are still failing to live up to our testimony on equality and we have been deeply moved by honest ministry about these failings. There is white privilege in our community, and there is work to do...
>
> We declare our commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist faith community. We are still wrestling with what this means for us. We have work to do and will return to this.
>
> Minute 17, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2021

Sex equality and gender diversity

7.29 From the very beginning of the Quaker movement, women's ministry was recognised as equal to that of men. Quakers today recognise and affirm the full equality of women in all aspects of our communities, including leadership, decision-making and ministry. Quaker communities also include a wide range of gender diversity. We understand these differences as a blessing and aim to offer the loving support that enables us all to live with openness and integrity.

7.30 God hath put no such difference between the Male and Female as men would make... Those that speak against the Power of the Lord, and the Spirit of the Lord speaking in a Woman, simply, by reason of her Sex, or because she is a Woman, not regarding the Seed, and Spirit, and Power that speaks in her; such speak against Christ, and his Church.

Margaret Fell, 1666

7.31 If someone comes into a Quaker Meeting, and they see all of these people acting out of their usual roles – you see all these women that are really out there and leading... or we see these men that are being so tender and listening really deeply and well to the people around them and making space for females to voice without being overtaken – someone might think, 'Wow, how did these people get like this?'... Quakers are exploring... gentle manhood and also listening manhood that maybe I don't see [in] other places, and also women leading, women being listened to, being held up.

Maggie Harrison, 2015

7.32 I was surprised and delighted by the straightforward acceptance I met when I told people I was transgender. I was happy to be asked to facilitate discussions about gender at Area Meeting. In those discussions I expected curiosity and maybe challenge. There was some curiosity, but also unexpected fellow feeling and understanding. My local and area meetings and colleagues on national committees have given me spiritual support throughout my transition.

My experience of transition is about integrity as well as freedom: not just integrity of 'I'm telling the truth' (although there is that), but also 'I am whole; I can be the whole of myself in the whole of my life' – structural integrity. My experience of being open about my gender among Quakers is of being free and mostly safe to bring the whole of myself to the Quaker community.

Fred Langridge, 2022

7.33 We all have human gifts and friendship to offer. We need to rejoice in the things that make us different, not be ashamed or excluded. Our differences are a blessing, and we must all work to ensure that the support is there in each meeting to allow this blessing to bear fruit.

We seek to provide places of worship and community that are welcoming and supportive to trans and non-binary people who want to be among us. Belonging is more than fitting in.

With glad hearts we acknowledge and affirm the trans and gender diverse Friends in our Quaker communities, and express appreciation for the contribution and gifts that they bring to our meetings, which are communities made up of people with a diverse range of gender expressions. The end of our travelling is for differences not to divide us. We rejoice in recognising God's creation in one another. This is what love requires of us.

Minute 31, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2021

Children and young people

7.34 Quaker communities thrive when they include people of all generations. Children and young people are Friends in their own right, with important gifts to offer. We all share responsibility for supporting young people in spiritual and practical ways, recognising that they often face many challenges.

7.35 When I was a teenager, it was hard for me to feel appreciated by adults for what I could bring to the business sessions. They had seen me grow and still saw me as the little kid who came to yearly meeting with my parents. My parents were still coming to yearly meeting, so there was no understanding that I was coming for myself and not with them. At sixteen, I felt like I was supposed to be supporting the greater yearly meeting in their process, but when I would stand up to speak, I was seen as a child who did not have things to bring to the community.

In my case, it was adults who did not see me weekly at meeting who were able to respond to my plea for help. I needed the kind of support where I could talk about the gifts that I had been given, and these adults were able to help me find my role in my meeting and in the yearly meeting. These adults were able to see that I was being led to be in the adult world because I had something to bring to both the adults and my own age group as someone who was willing to be a 'messenger'... to keep the teens informed about what was happening in their name.

I want to tell older adult Friends that it is important to support those younger Friends who want to go to worship or business meeting, because they may bring some point of view that is not being heard in the meeting. The younger voice or presence will add to the depth of the discussion. For me in my yearly meeting, I needed to support the adults who were making decisions that affected my generation, though that generation was not in the room. Standing up for what we want as young people is important because we are able to speak for ourselves and not let others say what we should or should not do.

Rebecca Sullivan, 2010

For more personal experiences of Friends, see D: Our Quaker life journeys.

Embracing change

7.36 Many Quaker communities in Britain lack social diversity. Naming this honestly calls us to examine its causes and to consider what changes are needed.

Each of us brings our own experiences, which may include the pain of feeling excluded, judged or found wanting by others. Such experiences can deepen our empathy for those who face exclusion. However, they are not a substitute for listening carefully to people's own stories and asking what they need to feel fully included. We should also remember that having experienced prejudice ourselves does not excuse us from examining and addressing our own prejudices.

We can work to create the kind of community where it is safe to make mistakes and be corrected for them. It is important for those affected by our mistakes to feel safe to correct us. If the truth we are being given is hard to hear, we should guard against becoming defensive or denying there is a problem.

7.37 Power and privilege are uncomfortable to explore, particularly if a critique relates to one's own advantages. It would be strange not to feel challenged when working on issues that confront how we feel about ourselves and how we behave towards others. This discomfort can be transformative. Shame and guilt, when handled with self-compassion, can be healed and replaced with healthy and positive feelings – of solidarity, of family, and of love.

Suki Ferguson, 2018

7.38 Sometimes Friends behave in prejudiced or discriminatory ways. An inclusive community does not expect those who suffer from insensitive or discriminatory behaviour to cope with it alone. We should all be ready to challenge prejudice in our communities. Those with eldership and pastoral care roles can support Friends who face discrimination, as well as guide those who act in discriminatory ways to change their behaviour.

See also 10: Spiritual and pastoral care. For more guidance on becoming diverse and inclusive communities, see the Resources.

Chapter 8:

How Quakers make decisions

8.01 At its best, the meeting for business is a disciplined exercise in corporate discernment of Guidance in particular matters of personal conduct, relationships and outward work. Unity is not a unity of opinion. We sense our unity when we have entered into our most profound experience as a corporate body. It sometimes has been called group mysticism. We come to know our oneness in God's presence. Our hesitations, doubts, quibbles, and agendas fall away. In that state we can see the decision or stance that expresses our fullest sense of the unity and peace of the meeting.

Patricia Loring, 1997

Introduction

8.02 Quaker communities share a unique practice for making decisions together, rooted in our faith that we can live under divine guidance, as communities as well as individuals. This process is often called the 'Quaker business method', but it is more than just a method for making decisions. It is a practice of collective discernment that relies on divine guidance to lead us into unity. This is why we call the meetings in which decisions are made 'meetings for worship for business', or sometimes 'meetings for worship for church affairs'.

This chapter explains how meetings for worship for business are held. It also explains the authority of the decisions we make and the preparation required for these meetings. It includes:

- Decision-making in the life of Quaker communities
- The discipline of Quaker decision-making
- Holding a meeting for worship for business

- The authority of our collective discernment
- How we prepare to take part in decision-making
- The role of threshing meetings

For more on divine guidance in community, see 4: Quaker discernment.

Decision-making in the life of Quaker communities

8.03 Quaker decision-making happens in a meeting for worship for business, where we come together to discern and act as a community. The meeting is grounded in worship because we see decision-making as part of our spiritual practice. This discipline grows from the experience of many generations of Friends, who have found it opens the way to hearing and following divine guidance.

8.04 The presence and guidance of God is available to us all individually and corporately, especially in the gathered meeting. Discernment is both a gift and a discipline. It can come unexpectedly, but it also takes work, honesty, courage, faith and surrender... Above all we know that in the end the decision-making is not ours: guidance comes from God who is beyond us as well as within us.

Minute 20, Britain Yearly Meeting, 1999

8.05 All Quaker communities should hold regular meetings for worship for business to make decisions together. Quaker committees, working groups and other bodies should use the same process for their collective decision-making.

Methods that appear quicker or easier can often lead to frustration and destructive conflict, especially when individuals or groups feel they have been ignored or silenced. A strength of the Quaker business method is that it involves every member of the community, encouraging everyone to work towards an outcome that unites diverse viewpoints.

8.06 As one Friend wrote as part of a report to Britain Yearly Meeting in 2013:

> There is great responsibility laid on all of us to make this work... I have been in a small number of meetings where the spirit and our business method were ignored. They were horrible.
>
> Anonymous, 2013

8.07 It is important that all members of the Quaker community take part in meetings for worship for business if they can, and everyone should be encouraged to contribute. Divine guidance can, and does, speak through even the least confident or experienced person.

Much of our decision-making as Quakers involves everyday matters such as finances, events or premises. By practising our discipline in these smaller decisions, we build the confidence and trust needed when larger, more challenging issues arise. Not every item will require drawn-out consideration. Part of discernment is knowing when things do not need great time.

The discipline of Quaker decision-making

8.08 We accept the collective discipline of the Quaker business method because experience has shown that it helps us find the divine guidance that brings us into unity.

In a meeting for worship for business:

- We speak to the whole meeting, briefly and simply.
- We do not repeat points already made by ourselves or others.
- We listen carefully for the truth that others' views may hold.
- We discern how we might be led to act as a whole community.
- We reach a decision based on unity, not a majority.
- We agree a written record of our decision within the meeting.

8.09 Let's try to keep grounded. Know that if we are all listening, anyone could be guided to give us the words we need to hear. Ask yourself: is this prompting to speak rooted in God's love for Friends present? Are these words for now and for all of us, or are they just for me? Will the words leave the Meeting with a sense of God's gathering and guiding presence, or will they scatter the Meeting and make it harder for us to listen to the Spirit? Words spoken in faith are not spoken in vain. Our discipline can enable us to move forward together in a surprising unity.

Adwoa Burnley, 2025

8.10 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

8.11 When we speak in a meeting for worship for business, we are offering vocal ministry. We aim to offer insights, information or perspectives that may help the community discern how it is led to act. We are not trying to persuade others, so we avoid using forceful or persuasive language to bring people around to our own view:

> What is required is a willingness to listen to what others have to say rather than to persuade them that one's own point of view represents what is right and proper. It also requires restraint. The reiteration of one point by several Friends each in their own way lends no weight to the point. What the meeting must learn to discern is its rightness, not how many people support it.

John Punshon, 1987

8.12 In a meeting for worship for business, we seek to discover how the whole community is being led to act at this time. We do not vote, because we are listening for a shared discernment that can unite everyone, rather than allowing a majority to overrule a minority:

> Quaker voteless decision-making... works effectively if it enables the group to be more, not less, than the sum of its parts – if it includes and moves beyond individuals' voices and experience, rather than shutting them out as irrelevant.
>
> Rachel Muers and Rhiannon Grant, 2016

8.13 A written record of each decision, called a 'minute', is agreed during the meeting itself by everyone present. This ensures that the wording faithfully reflects the meeting's discernment and avoids later uncertainty about what was decided.

Holding a meeting for worship for business

8.14 One or more people will serve as the clerk for the meeting. This could be a regular clerk or clerking team, or a Friend who is appointed for a particular occasion.

The clerk is responsible for guiding the meeting's discernment and identifying the potential unity, called 'the sense of the meeting'. This requires careful listening for divine guidance in the spoken ministry and sensitivity to when the meeting may be ready to unite in a decision.

The meeting may also appoint someone to serve as an elder to help with maintaining discipline, but everyone attending shares responsibility for the conduct of the meeting.

8.15 A similar pattern is followed for each item of business:

1. The issue requiring a decision will be introduced, either by someone in the meeting or by reference to information sent out in advance.

2. The meeting settles in worship until the clerk invites spoken contributions. Anyone who is led to speak indicates this and waits for the clerk to call them. The clerk will allow enough time between speakers for thoughtful consideration.

3. The clerk discerns when the meeting may have reached a point of decision. Sometimes this means recognising that the item needs further preparation and should be considered at a later meeting.

4. The clerk writes a draft minute of the decision and the meeting supports them by maintaining a worshipful silence while this is done.

5. The clerk reads the draft minute to the meeting and asks whether it accurately reflects the discernment of the meeting.

6. If anyone wishes to offer changes to the draft minute, they indicate this and wait for the clerk to call them to speak. No new issues should be raised at this stage. The purpose of any changes should be to clarify the discernment of the meeting. This could include reminding the meeting of an important point that has not been included in the draft.

7. The clerk reads the amended draft to the meeting and asks whether it is acceptable. If so, everyone present will indicate this, often by saying 'I hope so'. This expresses the hope that the meeting has faithfully discerned divine guidance. Once the draft is accepted it becomes a minute of the meeting.

8.16 Meetings for worship for business can also be held online or as a 'blended' meeting, with some people gathered in person and others joining remotely. This can make it easier to include those who cannot attend in person, though it can also bring challenges. Whatever the format, the discipline remains the same, though the way people indicate a wish to speak or accept a draft minute will depend on the technology used.

See 1: Quaker worship and the Resources for further guidance on holding meetings for worship for business, including online and blended meetings.

The authority of our collective discernment

8.17 Once a minute has been accepted in a meeting for worship for business, it expresses the discernment of the meeting as a whole on a particular matter at that time. This does not necessarily mean that everyone fully agrees with the decision, but Friends can unite with the minute if it faithfully reflects the meeting's discernment. It is important to remember that the aim is not to satisfy individual participants but to be faithful to divine leadings. The community may discern that it is right to look again at a decision if new information becomes available.

It can be difficult to accept a decision reached in our absence that we disagree with. Part of Quaker discipline is to recognise the discernment of a meeting for worship for business, whether or not we were present. This reflects our trust in the discernment process, accepting that the minute records how the meeting was guided, even if the outcome is not what we expected.

8.18 Some Friends have described finding unity in this kind of meeting for worship for business:

> When things were at an impasse, the clerk called for a period of silence... When the clerk read a draft minute, the first to call for its acceptance was the Friend who had previously been arguing the contrary view.
>
> What happened surprised us all... there was a strong sense in the meeting that we were being led to go forward in faith.
>
> Then the spirit took over. Instead of a small and timid reckoning with the issue, Friends were moved to be bold in a startling way.
>
> I felt in the silence the whole body of Friends uniting and rejoicing in the Spirit.
>
> Presentation to Britain Yearly Meeting, 2013

How we prepare to take part in decision-making

8.19 A Quaker community needs to make decisions about all aspects of its life, worship, work, and witness. Careful preparation will enable everyone who comes to a meeting to contribute fully.

Preparation by the clerk

8.20 The most obvious preparation is done by the person who has been given the responsibility for clerking the meeting.

The clerk prepares and circulates the agenda, ensures that information about each item is shared in good time, and arranges for items to be introduced during the meeting. They need to be clear about what the meeting is being asked to consider or decide. For routine matters, the clerk may prepare a draft minute beforehand to help the meeting use its time effectively.

The clerk should be willing to set aside their personal views about the decisions to be made. Their role is to serve the meeting, listening sensitively for divine leadings. They must also be ready to guide the process and uphold the discipline of the meeting.

For more guidance on clerking a meeting for worship for business, see the Resources.

Preparation by all those taking part

8.21 We all share the responsibility to prepare for a meeting for worship for business by considering the information provided and arriving with an open mind. We may hold strong views, but we should not bring a determination to get our own way. Discernment relies on a willingness to listen to others, to have our minds changed and to wait expectantly for guidance.

Everyone who takes part in the meeting should be ready to follow the discipline of the Quaker business method. This practice has served

Quakers well for more than three centuries, helping us to respond creatively to divine guidance. It is important that everyone in a Quaker community is encouraged to learn how to practise discernment together.

The role of threshing meetings

8.22 Threshing meetings among Quakers today are meetings at which an issue can be 'threshed out' – for example, at which a range of opinions and feelings can be aired, and a range of perspectives and information shared. Threshing meetings are now almost always presented as preparatory to business meetings. They are seen to be needed when a complex issue is to come to a business meeting and would benefit from exploration in advance – or, sometimes, where a complex issue has come to a business meeting and the meeting has been unable to reach a decision.

Rachel Muers and Rhiannon Grant, 2016

8.23 When a community faces a particularly complex or sensitive issue, it can be helpful to hold a threshing meeting as part of the preparation for a meeting for worship for business.

A threshing meeting provides space for all voices to be heard and for strongly held feelings to be expressed without the pressure of reaching a decision. It is part of the process of moving from a range of differing views towards unity in a later meeting for worship for business.

It is important that the threshing meeting is organised to be inclusive of the whole community and that everyone feels confident to participate fully. This will mean listening deeply and giving enough time for everyone's contribution. Information about both the issue and the process should be provided in advance.

For guidance on holding a threshing meeting, see the Resources.

Chapter 9:

Service in the Quaker community

9.01 To make a safe home for small children, to comfort one person in sorrow, to do one's work as efficiently as possible, to listen with understanding, to be gentle with the old and courteous to the young – these are the humble tasks to which most men and women are called. They build the home or the meeting or the community which is the first step towards the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The second is to be aware of greater tasks and to be ready to be used in solving them – ready, not worried or anxious or envious, but content to wait, exercising a ministry of prayer to sustain the healers and the reconcilers already at work in their thousands.

Olive Tyson, 1966

Introduction

9.02 The way we use our gifts to serve others is our ministry. Ministry can take different forms: within our local meetings, in the wider Quaker community or outside it. Quakers do not have separate priests or ministers to do the work of running the community for us. Instead, we rely on the Spirit to lead each of us into the service our communities need. Our willingness to serve helps our communities to grow as welcoming spiritual homes.

This chapter describes the kinds of service that Friends may be led to offer in a Quaker community. It includes:

- The spirituality of Quaker service
- Intervisitation
- The work of Quaker communities

- Simplifying Quaker service
- Varieties of Quaker service

The spirituality of Quaker service

9.03 Quaker service is our part in building up the spiritual community. Sharing our gifts through service is one element of living a fulfilled life. It nurtures our sense of belonging to the wider Quaker family.

Every contribution to our community life is part of our ministry, whether doing the washing-up, clerking a meeting or working as an employee of a Quaker organisation. The fruits of our service are seen in the way our communities flourish.

9.04 For some it is right to give their whole lives explicitly to concrete forms of service, but for most their service will lie 'in the sheer quality of the soul displayed in ordinary occupations'. Such ordinary occupations are sometimes an essential contribution to the liberation of another person for wider service, and in any case, the inspiration of a dedicated life lived in simple surroundings, though often untraceable, may be profound in its reach.

Gerald Littleboy, 1945

9.05 We are all responsible for nurturing our meetings and the wider Quaker community. We share responsibility for caring for each other, for our worship together and for the work that arises from our collective discernment. As far as possible, each of us should be ready to offer the particular ministry that enables us to share and develop our gifts.

9.06 Our diverse gifts serve and support both our inner and outer work as witness to our lives. In whatever way in which we faithfully serve, both as individuals and collectively, we are humbly at the behest of a greater power. Together, we can be seen as a series of equal links, as in a chain, binding our diversity into a unity of spirit.

Holyhead Friends, 2014

9.07 Service to our Quaker community can be joyful, energising and fulfilling. All acts of service that help build up the community are equally important. We may serve locally, or on Yearly Meeting committees or other bodies, or with international Quaker organisations. Some of us may be employed by Quaker meetings or organisations, where our work, as is the case in any job, is also part of our ministry. This might take the form of book-keeping or childcare for an area or local meeting, being a warden or resident Friend of a meeting house, or working for Britain Yearly Meeting or another Quaker organisation.

9.08 And what I said about working for you is true and is important. The fact that this is work being done as a Quaker on behalf of Quakers means more to me than if I were just doing it myself. On top of passion it adds duty and obligation, a sense that through this work I am serving my community. A community across space... and a community across time.

Oliver Robertson, 2010

Intervisitation

9.09 Simply visiting another Quaker meeting may be an important service. Many small meetings particularly welcome visitors, who help to strengthen relationships with the wider Quaker community.

9.10 We urge Friends, when staying away from home during holiday or on business, to attend a meeting for worship if there is one within reach. Such attendance may well have the effect of strengthening the meeting, and of helping Friends who were hitherto strangers to know one another.

London Yearly Meeting, 1925 and 1994

For more on sharing our gifts, see 6: The meaning of Quaker community. For other forms of ministry, see 19: Spiritual roots of Quaker witness and D: Our Quaker life journeys.

The work of Quaker communities

9.11 Quaker communities exist to enable Friends to worship together, discern the leadings of the Spirit, care for each other, live out our testimony to the world, and welcome new people to share the Quaker way.

There are many ways of organising these activities, which vary according to different kinds of community. These include local and area Quaker meetings as well as regional and national communities, online and in-person worship groups, Quaker camps, and a wide range of Quaker recognised bodies.

Everyone in a Quaker community shares the responsibility for its life and work, but some Friends may be appointed to specific tasks, such as clerking or trusteeship, for a set period. There may also be opportunities for occasional or one-off tasks, such as organising a community event or updating a website.

The whole community, in its meetings for worship for business, decides which roles are needed and who will serve in them. Friends who take on these responsibilities are trusted to act faithfully, while remaining accountable to the community that appointed them.

For more on the roles and responsibilities of different Quaker communities, see 12: Quaker meeting structures in Britain.

Simplifying Quaker service

9.12 Quaker communities should aim to organise their activities in ways that are as simple, inclusive, transparent, and sustainable as possible. Simplicity of structures and processes can free Friends from excessive and burdensome tasks, better enabling them to follow the leadings of the Spirit.

We should focus on the tasks that are really needed in our communities and how best to do them. This does not always mean filling a traditional

set of roles or committees. Our communities should regularly consider:

- which roles and committees are currently needed
- what their responsibilities should be
- how they should relate to the rest of the community.

When Friends are appointed to roles or committees, they should be given a clear role description, with appropriate handover arrangements. Training should be provided for new role-holders, especially where the role requires some up-to-date specialist knowledge.

Our communities should take care to balance the tasks we are trying to fulfil with the capacities of people available to offer service. This will enable Quaker service to be a source of connection and a chance to use our Spirit-given gifts, without becoming a burden for those who serve.

Role-holders and committee members should be appointed through a Quaker nominations process for a time-limited term of service. Role-holders need our ongoing support. Even if our own ability to serve is limited at times, we can all support and uphold those who are led to serve in this way.

9.13 I have in mind something deeper than the simplification of our external programs, our absurdly crowded calendars of appointments through which so many pantingly and frantically gasp. These do become simplified in holy obedience, and the poise and peace we have been missing can really be found. But there is a deeper, an internal simplification of the whole of one's personality, stilled, tranquil, in childlike trust listening ever to Eternity's whisper, walking with a smile into the dark.

Thomas R Kelly, 1941

For more on appointing Friends to roles, see 11: Nominations.

Varieties of Quaker service

9.14 There are many kinds of Quaker service, in local and area meetings and in the wider Quaker community, including:

- clerking
- treasurership
- nominations
- trusteeship
- safeguarding
- spiritual and pastoral care
- work with children and young people
- wardenship
- chaplaincy and prison ministry
- travelling in the ministry.

All of these, and others, provide opportunities for sharing our gifts, as our ministry to Friends and others.

9.15 Testimony concerning Kathleen Rodham (1927—2016):

> Kathleen took on many roles with Middlesbrough Quaker Meeting... She and Eric acquired a reputation for being the last to leave the meeting house on Sunday mornings, always willing to do whatever was needed... Whatever role she undertook for the Society, Kathleen gave it her full commitment. The Northern Friends Peace Board, on which she served as a member for many years, benefitted from her gifts and experience in general discussions, on specific projects, in working groups and as a member of the Board executive, where she gave mindful support to the Coordinator.
>
> Pickering & Hull Area Meeting, 2022

For more on Quaker concerns, see 4: Quaker discernment.

Clerking

9.16 The clerk, or a clerking team, enables the collective discernment of the community in its regular meeting for worship for business. This includes preparing the agenda in advance, guiding the participation of Friends during the meeting, drafting minutes on the meeting's behalf, and ensuring that minutes are agreed in the meeting.

Clerks will usually be responsible for checking that minuted decisions are carried out and sharing information with Friends. They are often also the named contact for their community, and a link to other Quaker bodies.

For more on meetings for worship for business, see 8: How Quakers make decisions. For guidance on clerking, see the Resources.

Treasurership

9.17 Treasurers are responsible for recording and reporting on the community's finances, and paying and receiving its funds. They should be comfortable with understanding and explaining financial information, but accounting skills are not necessary. A treasurer serves their community by informing and advising on financial matters, but significant financial decisions are made by the whole community in its meeting for worship for business.

For guidance on being a treasurer, see the Resources.

Nominations

9.18 Nominations committees are responsible for recognising the gifts and leadings of Friends in their community and discerning who to suggest for specific forms of service. Nominations committees do not appoint Friends to roles. This decision is made by the whole community in its meeting for worship for business.

For more on the role of nominations committees, see 11: Nominations.

Trusteeship

9.19 Quaker trustees hold legal responsibility for our charities, including employment of staff and stewardship of property and other resources. Trustees enable Quaker communities to make use of our resources by ensuring that legal requirements are met and proper financial and other procedures are followed.

Although trustees are legally responsible for the management of charities, they should be guided by the discernment of the area meeting or other Quaker community that appoints them.

For more on Quaker trustees, see 13: Stewardship and trusteeship.

Safeguarding

9.20 Safeguarding coordinators and others in safeguarding roles help to ensure that children, young people and adults at risk are protected from harm in our communities. They help to identify potential risks and how to reduce them. They are also the main point of contact for anyone to report concerns about the safety of people in their community.

For guidance on safeguarding, see the Resources.

Spiritual and pastoral care

9.21 Spiritual care includes support for the spiritual life of the meeting, the discipline of Quaker worship and collective discernment, and the spiritual nurture of Friends, including children and young people. Pastoral care involves practical and emotional support for Friends who have extra needs or are in difficult circumstances. This support may be carried out by appointed elders and pastoral carers, by a joint committee for spiritual and pastoral care, or in other ways.

For more information, see 10: Spiritual and pastoral care.

Work with children and young people

9.22 The support and spiritual nurture of children and young people is a central part of our ministry as all-age communities. Friends serve in this way by offering children's meetings, Quaker youth work, camps, and residentials. These all enable children and young people to develop their understanding and practice of a Spirit-led life, and to be nurtured by inclusive and loving communities.

For guidance on Quaker work with children and young people, see the Resources.

Wardenship

9.23 Wardens are appointed to look after some of our meeting houses. In many cases they also live on the premises. Wardens may additionally manage lettings to other groups, enabling our meeting houses to be more widely used for the benefit of local communities:

> As Friends, we cannot separate our religious calling from our practical work for the kingdom of God. As Friends concerned for wardenship, we make our contributions in the local community to those who come to our meeting house. We appear to offer our facilities, but in fact we offer our love.
>
> Quaker Home Service conference on wardenship, 1981

Chaplaincy and prison ministry

9.24 Quaker chaplains may serve in a variety of settings, including prisons, universities, hospitals, and hospices, often as part of an ecumenical or interfaith chaplaincy team. Their primary role is to support people of all faiths and none to explore the leadings of the Spirit in a trustworthy relationship. Quaker prison chaplains minister to people who are incarcerated and those who care for them, including

prisoners and staff, and keep Friends informed about criminal justice issues.

The work of chaplains may need continuing support, both financial and spiritual, from the community that appoints them.

For guidance on Quaker chaplaincy, see the Resources.

Travelling in the ministry

9.25 Any Friend may be led by the Spirit to visit Quaker communities anywhere in the world, to share their worship and fellowship, and sometimes to bring a particular Spirit-led message. When this leading is tested by the discernment of their Quaker community, it may be recognised as a concern to travel in the ministry. The community that sends a travelling minister should provide them with a written record of support for their ministry, called a 'travelling minute', as well as practical and spiritual support where possible. All Quaker communities should be prepared to welcome Friends who are travelling under concern or serving away from their own worshipping communities.

9.26 When the call to travel in the ministry came, I resisted. I told the Lord that I was too shy, too introverted, too young. I thought that maybe I'd read too many early Quaker books. I asked God to give me a clear itinerary and a sense of what I'd be asked to say. And though no more than a next step appeared, the call persisted and grew in me.

I heard that, if I took the next step in faith, I would find Christ travelling the road with me. I wouldn't have worked out plans and strategies, but I'd have the dearest of guides. Still, to say yes to this, I needed the help of my meeting, the support of friends, the faithfulness of companions in the ministry. I've needed this help all along the way to keep close to the Living Teacher, to discern opportunities from temptations.

As I yielded to the call, allowing myself to be drawn where God would lead me, allowing words to be given in God's time, I discovered that this was less about anything I could offer others, and more about God's work in me. Through the travels, the Lord has been teaching me to trust, to move at the pace of prayer, to stay rooted in my need for Divine help. The encouragements and elders I have needed have been given, by grace, just when I've needed them: I am learning to keep my eyes open to this.

The call to gospel ministry is challenging in a world of plans and procedures. It asks obedience to Christ's call, even when we can't see the reasons or predict what will happen. This is a school of faithfulness in which I, with all my anxiety and busyness, have very much needed to be enrolled.

Matt Rosen, 2025

Chapter 10:

Spiritual and pastoral care

10.01 Loving care is not something that those sound in mind and body 'do' for others but a process that binds us together. God has made us loving and the imparting of love to another satisfies something deep within us.

Quaker faith & practice 12.01, 1994

Introduction

10.02 As Quaker communities, we aim to be loving, equal and inclusive. We want everyone – young or old, newcomer or established Friend – to be valued and cared for, so that all can thrive and live fully as children of the Light.

Responsibility for spiritual and pastoral care is much more than filling a necessary role within the meeting. It is a spiritual calling – a precious opportunity for spiritual growth, learning and sharing. Those who embrace this service can find it a joy and a privilege to be invited more deeply into others' lives and to build up their Quaker community.

This chapter includes:

- Spiritual and practical needs
- Eldership
- Pastoral care
- Ways of organising spiritual and pastoral care
- The role of the area meeting
- Necessary skills and knowledge
- Caring for the carers

Spiritual and practical needs

10.03 In order to address the wide range of needs within our communities, we often divide activities into two broad groups:

- enhancing the spiritual life of the meeting and of individual Friends
- caring for the practical and emotional needs of individuals and families.

In practice there is no sharp dividing line between the two categories. Practical and emotional difficulties are likely to affect spiritual well-being, and the spiritual support a meeting offers may enable people to cope more easily with other problems in their life.

10.04 When I sat as an elder for the first time in my current Meeting I had already been an elder elsewhere, so thought that I understood the job. I came out of worship wondering if I had truly done my best to 'hold' it in the Spirit, and whether some of the old-timers would have anything to say. One approached me, so I prepared myself to receive some gentle suggestions. She said, 'Do you know where the loo rolls are kept?'

I have often thought that 'the things that are eternal' include the need for tea and biscuits. A Friend in our Meeting pointed out that these are possibly our version of the sharing of bread and wine ritualised in other churches. I think she is right. That and all temporal matters around our Meetings are our versions of the sacred buildings, words, hierarchies, and rituals that support other churches and other faiths. Another Friend, who works tirelessly on such things as Quaker trusteeship, stewardship and finance, sees that work as worship, holding our increasingly fragile structures in the Spirit to sustain our Meetings. Can knowing where the loo rolls are kept be our version of washing each other's feet? That may be a step too far. But mutual care often needs to be temporal before it can be recognised as spiritual.

Anne Watson, 2025

Eldership

10.05 What I find compelling and inspiring about the lives of… early Friends is their mutual and active desire to be accountable for the spiritual health, nurture and behavior of members, attenders, and the meeting as a whole. I believe we need to get back to this accountability, and revitalize the culture of mutual spiritual nurturing and care within our faith community.

Margery Larrabee, 2007

10.06 The ministry of supporting Friends' spiritual needs is often known as 'eldership'. It includes ensuring that meetings for worship, meetings for worship for business, and meetings for special occasions (such as funerals, memorials and weddings) are held in accordance with Quaker practice. All these gatherings should be held in a way that helps everyone present to find a connection with the Inward Light. A habit of loving, listening attention, otherwise known as 'Quaker discipline', should be carefully fostered to enable a spiritually vibrant community.

10.07 In meeting for worship one day, about a year into my attendance at Quaker meetings, a Friend ministered about 'discipline'. It's the sort of word that usually gets my hackles up, implying a harsh and impersonal constraint imposed from outside. Sometimes it can simply feel like a euphemism for punishment. But as I sat and reflected, a vision suddenly came to me: I saw myself getting into difficulties in deep water (not difficult for me to imagine, as I can barely swim!). The Lifeguard had come to my rescue and was holding my head above water; and I understood that if I wanted to be rescued I needed to school myself not to thrash about in panic, but to relinquish control and let the Lifeguard do the work. This was *discipline*.

Stevie Krayer, 2023

10.08 We see the visible part of the eldership anchor when elders close worship, or intervene in problematic ministry. What we don't see is the laying of the length of heavy chain along the seabed that

> grounds elders in what they do, or how they act, yet this leads to our experience of a grounded community. In our local meetings the chain of eldership is built not just on elders' personal devotional practices, but on foundational micro-acts that build a worshipping community... In other contexts, for our other activities the contrast between being handed the first-aid box and having time to plan to lay the anchor is stark.
>
> Gill Grimshaw, 2026

For more on eldership, see 14: Quaker marriage, 15: Quaker approaches to death and dying.

10.09 The spiritual life of individual Friends and the community as a whole can be developed by:

- welcoming and including newcomers
- creating opportunities to learn about the Quaker way
- guiding Friends towards a deeper experience of worship and discernment
- encouraging people who are less confident to find their voice
- ensuring that more assertive people do not dominate discussions, worship or discernment.

Helpful activities include:

- discussions, workshops and meetings for learning
- sharing personal stories and spiritual experience in a prayerful setting, such as worship sharing or spiritual friendship groups
- meeting informally for social activities and shared meals.

As Friends grow to know each other, we can share more fully in each other's joys, sorrows and concerns, helping us all to deepen our relationship with the Light Within.

For more on spiritual care, see 1: Quaker worship, 4: Quaker discernment and 8: How Quakers make decisions. For guidance on meetings for learning, worship sharing and spiritual friendship groups, see the Resources.

Pastoral care

10.10 Pastoral care involves helping to create a loving community and being aware of Friends' individual needs. Anyone in our communities may need practical or emotional support at some time. Special attention may be required by those who are new to the meeting, young people living independently for the first time, sick or elderly people, and those who are struggling financially or experiencing major life changes. We should also be alert to practices and language that may unintentionally exclude individuals or groups.

Some people may have needs that are best addressed on a personal and confidential basis. They may simply require a sensitive listener who will support them without judging or rushing to offer advice.

Some Friends have come to Quakerism following difficult or abusive experiences in other religious communities. All of us may bring feelings from previous painful situations into our Quaker communities. We may have strong reactions to language or situations that remind us of former hurts. Pastoral carers may be able to encourage Friends to reflect on the source of these reactions, and an inclusive Quaker community can be part of a healing process.

When a conflict arises within the community, the support of pastoral care Friends may be needed to find a constructive resolution.

For more on ensuring everyone is included, see 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities. For more on responding to conflict, see 16: Conflict in Quaker communities.

Ways of organising spiritual and pastoral care

10.11 There are many ways of organising spiritual and pastoral care in a Quaker community. The priority should be to put clear arrangements in place and make sure everyone is aware of them.

In a Quaker community, everyone gives and receives care according to their needs and leadings. Some meetings share responsibility for organising this equally, but most communities will appoint some Friends to be responsible for spiritual and pastoral care for a limited period. Having some system in place helps to ensure care is not overlooked.

Traditionally, Quaker meetings have appointed some Friends as elders, with others responsible for pastoral care. Some meetings instead have one group with responsibility for both spiritual and pastoral care. Whether there is one group or two, all these Friends should meet regularly to pray for the community and those within it, to share experience and learning, and to discern how they are being led to support the community.

For guidance on spiritual and pastoral care, see the Resources.

The role of the area meeting

10.12 Most spiritual and pastoral care is offered within local Quaker meetings, but it is the area meeting that is responsible for ensuring appropriate care is provided. The area meeting appoints Friends to these roles after a nominations process, in consultation with their local meetings.

Appointed Friends also have responsibilities to their area meeting as a whole, including encouraging and supporting people to apply for membership. All Friends with responsibility for care across the area meeting should meet regularly for discernment, inspiration, learning, and mutual support. These can be opportunities to share good practice and explore different ways of organising and offering care.

For more on appointing Friends to roles, see 9: Service in the Quaker community and 11: Nominations. For more on the responsibilities of area meetings, see 12: Quaker meeting structures in Britain. For information on Quaker membership, see 18: Membership.

Necessary skills and knowledge

10.13 People have a diversity of gifts to offer, and a Quaker community will ideally try to appoint a group of Friends with complementary skills and experience. People are not necessarily born with the qualities required for spiritual and pastoral care. Even the most gifted person may need to gain confidence and clarity about the tasks involved. Appropriate training in various aspects of this work is available, and communities should encourage and financially support Friends to take up these opportunities.

Friends who provide spiritual and pastoral care should have a capacity for attentive listening and a loving respect for each person in the community. They will also have to exercise careful discernment about issues of confidentiality and safeguarding.

These Friends carry an important responsibility for the well-being of their community and the individuals within it. They are also given authority to challenge the community, when necessary, to greater faithfulness and self-discipline. This requires a commitment to, and a growing understanding of, the Quaker way.

10.14 We can feel very aware of the role of elders in responding to overt behaviour or ministry which might diminish the gatheredness of our worship, but while more visible, this is a small part of the role in meeting for worship. Sometimes in eldering a meeting I've felt led to leave such eldership tasks to others or till later, feeling the more precious thing I can do for the gathered meeting, in that moment, is to engage at my deepest with the meeting on an energetic level. To seek godde/light more deeply inside myself and let that use my soul to reach out and help 'hold' the gathered meeting.

Carrie Comfort, 2022

10.15 Friends taking on this service should be open to learning from others with wider knowledge, experience and wisdom. They should also be ready to acknowledge when an issue or task is beyond their competence, and to recognise when the time has come to seek help from elsewhere. They should bear in mind that their appointment is only for a limited time and does not give them a privileged status.

10.16 Christ took not upon him this kind of greatness, nor did exercise this kind of authority; but he was a servant; he made use of the gift of the Spirit, of the power of life wherewith the Father filled him, to minister and serve with. He never did lord it over the consciences of any of his disciples; but did bear with them, and pity them in their infirmities.

Isaac Penington, 1660

Caring for the carers

10.17 It would be a mistake to assume that those with outwardly well-organised lives do not need assistance. Many apparently secure carers live close to despair within themselves. We all have our needs.

Quaker faith & practice 12.01, 2013

10.18 Caring for the spiritual and practical well-being of others is demanding, especially in difficult times. Friends who fulfil this role need to be aware of their own needs for practical and emotional support, for continuing learning and for regular spiritual practice. Recognising our own needs is essential for supporting others well:

Self-care is never a selfish act – it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Any time we can listen to the true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose lives we touch.

Parker J Palmer, 1999

10.19 Those who take on this service should have the understanding, support and encouragement of their whole Quaker community. They need to be nourished by their area meeting community to enable themselves and their meetings to flourish:

> My experience has led me to conclude that the key to good eldership is that the meeting understands the role and its relevance, and supports those appointed to serve in it. Friends can be brought into that understanding by being asked to fill the role for specific events or by being made aware of an accompanying elder.
>
> What have I learned in the swampy lowlands? I remind myself often that it is not for elders to solve problems but to help create the conditions in which the meeting can work through them. I have learned that we all need to remember that it is part of the unwritten contract of being a Quaker that we have elders. Finally I have learned that in the end you just have to be a Quaker.
>
> Jenny Routledge, 2014

Chapter 11:

Nominations

11.01 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:4–7
(New Revised Standard Version)

Introduction

11.02 The way we choose people to serve in Quaker roles within our communities, committees and other bodies is called 'nominations'.

Through these processes, we seek to make appointments to roles in a way that builds up our community, uses everyone's gifts and shares responsibility widely.

Our communities thrive because we are all involved in upholding and running them. We share the duties, responsibility and authority for this work. We all have a part to play in deciding what needs to be done and who will undertake the necessary work for a set time. This discernment is the core of the nominations process.

This chapter explains what is involved in Quaker nominations processes and why we use them. It includes:

- Recognising gifts and leadings
- The nominations process
- Requirements for appointed roles

- Discernment in Quaker nominations
- Finding Friends willing and able to serve
- When things don't work out
- Serving with joy

Recognising gifts and leadings

11.03 To be without an ordained clergy is not to be without either leadership or ministry. The gifts of the Spirit to us include both. For us, calls to particular ministries are usually for a limited period of time, and those gifts pertain to the task rather than the person. In one lifetime a person may be called to a number of ministries.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

11.04 Each of us has gifts which can be developed and used to support our community. We may also be led to Quaker service in the wider world. Anyone considering Quaker service should approach it with an open heart and mind. Each person discerns their own leadings, but we also discern them collectively. It is the responsibility of our Quaker communities to help each of us discover our gifts and how to develop them:

> We want to belong to a Society that reaches out to all people, celebrates and embraces differences and encourages use of skills and diversity from wherever and whomever they come.

Eccles Local Meeting, 2006

11.05 Our nominations practice is based on the understanding that everyone can be led by the Spirit, with the continual possibility of growth through faithfulness and service. We are all equal, but each of us carries particular gifts and insights. These can be offered for the spiritual growth of Friends and meetings, and the good of the wider

world. Gifts may include talents such as communication or generosity, professional and life skills such as cooking or book-keeping, and spiritual qualities such as wisdom or a deep prayer life.

Our gifts, and how we are called to use them, may change during our lives. The most obvious choice of appointing an accountant to be a treasurer, or a teacher to run a children's meeting, will not always be the right one. We should be prepared to think widely and deeply about each person's gifts to discern how they can best serve a specific community at a specific time.

11.06 I can well remember the first time that I was approached to give service in my local meeting, though it was nearly thirty years ago. The person who asked me was a Friend for whom I had a healthy respect and she explained carefully the process that had suggested that I was the right person to join the Catering Committee. I had never come across a similar process anywhere before. I remember clearly too how I felt – a sense of belonging, of being fully accepted, with something to contribute to a community I had tentatively joined as a battered spiritual refugee. I had found my place.

Each time I am asked to do something for Quakers I am filled with apprehension about the challenge but know from experience that I can trust the discernment that suggested my name. I have found that I will be given what I need. Each appointment confirms and strengthens my feeling that I belong to the Religious Society of Friends.

My hope is that when I can no longer take on active roles that I will still grow through the service of upholding, supporting and encouraging those who do.

Judith Thompson, 2016

For more on gifts and leadings, see 4: Quaker discernment and 9: Service in the Quaker community.

The nominations process

11.07 Quaker communities use a discernment process – the nominations process – to choose people for many roles, rather than electing role-holders or relying on people to volunteer themselves. This is because these roles carry responsibility on behalf of the whole community. Friends who take on this work should be chosen to serve based on collective discernment of the gifts the community needs at the time.

Most Quaker communities, including local meetings, area meetings and Britain Yearly Meeting, use nominations committees to support the process of finding people to fill roles.

11.08 The nominations process involves spiritual discernment on the part of:

- the appointing body (e.g. a local or area meeting), which is responsible for discerning the need for a role and deciding who to appoint
- normally, a nominations group or committee that helps to find someone whose gifts fit them to serve in the role
- the person who is asked to serve.

Appointing bodies should be clear about what tasks really need to be done and how best to divide up the work. It can help to regularly review the way we organise our communities.

Typically, when someone is needed to fill a particular role, the appointing body asks the nominations committee to find a suitable Friend. The nominations committee meets to discern who might be suitable for the role, then approaches the relevant Friend(s) to check whether they are willing to serve. The nomination is then brought back to the appointing body's meeting for worship for business, where the nomination is considered and the appointment may be made.

Appointments to roles should be for a specific limited term. This is to ensure that responsibilities are shared over time and that no

individual becomes too dominant or discourages others from taking on responsibility. A common pattern is to appoint for terms of three years and to allow only two consecutive terms in the same role.

11.09 Nominating the Friends to serve on the nominations committee itself should be done by another group – sometimes a short-term group specially appointed for the purpose or by asking the members of the appointing body to nominate suitable Friends. This helps ensure that nominations committees do not become self-selecting.

11.10 A good nominations process:

- has clarity about what work is needed, why and for how long
- is based on knowledge of the present skills and future potential of members and attenders
- involves the whole community in appointing people to Quaker roles
- helps our communities become more diverse and inclusive
- recognises the present and future needs of the Quaker community
- makes provision for record-keeping, safeguarding and other aspects of good practice
- provides role descriptions, training and induction for new role-holders
- is rooted in worship, waiting on the leadings of the Spirit.

For more on meetings for worship for business, see 8: How Quakers make decisions.

Requirements for appointed roles

11.11 Many roles, such as clerking, nominations, safeguarding, spiritual and pastoral care, treasurership, and trusteeship, carry significant

responsibility. Friends undertaking these roles should have a demonstrated commitment to their Quaker community and a good understanding of Quaker practice. For certain roles, membership may also be required, either by Britain Yearly Meeting or by the governing document of the relevant charity.

For all roles it is important that those appointed can be relied on by the community to uphold Quaker practices.

Some roles, including work with children and young people, have specific safeguarding or other legal requirements, which may include background checks and training. The process for appointment to these roles must comply with the safeguarding policy of the appointing body.

For more on spiritual and pastoral care, see 10: Spiritual and pastoral care. For more on trusteeship, see 13: Stewardship and trusteeship. For more on membership, see 18: Membership. For guidance on safeguarding and membership requirements for specific roles, see the Resources.

Discernment in Quaker nominations

11.12 We are looking for jobs to fit people as well as people to fit jobs. We have to assemble our community from its component parts, which is all of us.

West Scotland Nominations Committee, 2017

11.13 Where the committee is discerning the actual name to nominate… trust becomes difficult. Sometimes the pattern of names that comes out is suspicious to some Friends – the same names being cycled through the 'more important' roles, and limited opportunities for meaningful service to other Friends, or those newer to our community. Sometimes there is a strong but frustrated desire to serve that burns in a particular Friend, and the committee seem to be unaware – or uncaring. Sometimes the committee tells the Meeting that they could not find someone willing and able to serve, but a Friend is sat thinking 'I could do

that, and they never asked me'. It is important to remember the important role of nominations in bringing people more fully into participation in our community.

Sam Barnett-Cormack, 2017

11.14 Nominations committees should be well grounded in Quaker practices. They should work together with openness, honesty and trust, maintaining appropriate confidentiality within the group. They need sensitivity when approaching Friends about possible service, and tact if they discern that reappointment for a second term would not be helpful.

For more on discernment, see 4: Quaker discernment.

Finding Friends willing and able to serve

11.15 Ceisiwch adnabod eich gilydd yn y pethau tragwyddol.

Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal.

Cynghorion a holiadau / Advices & queries 18, 1994

11.16 To do their work well, nominations committees must understand the current needs of the community and be able to explain the nature of the roles available. They should encourage Friends to tell them about their availability and how they are led to serve. Less confident people can be encouraged to undertake service in the knowledge that they will be supported by others. People new to Quaker service may find it helpful to work alongside an existing role-holder for a time, or to have support from a more experienced Friend.

11.17 If a nominations committee cannot find a suitable Friend to serve in a role, they should inform the appointing body so that it can consider whether that role is still needed or can realistically be sustained.

Sometimes a role can be shared between two or more people. Different tasks within a role can also be separated out or combined in different ways to suit the gifts and leadings of the Friends who are available.

The appointing body might, for example:

- work with another body to share role-holders, or
- ask for help from another body to find a Friend willing to be appointed to the role.

11.18 Not all tasks in a Quaker community require appointed role-holders. Many one-off or occasional activities can be carried out by any willing person. Some relatively simple regular tasks, such as gardening, making refreshments or door-keeping, might be offered to anyone who is willing to volunteer. These can also be useful opportunities for newcomers to become more involved in the community in a less formal way.

For guidance on simplifying roles and structures, see the Resources.

When things don't work out

11.19 However careful the nominations process has been, sometimes an appointment will not work out as hoped. The circumstances that lead to this situation vary, and communities will need tact and sensitivity to respond appropriately. It is at the discretion of the appointing body to end an appointment at any time if necessary:

> The great aim of a Christian community is to enable its members to know what their gift is and then to enable them to exercise it to the glory of God. This may sometimes involve a prolonged and perhaps painful exercise before some members come to accept that the gift they have to offer is not the one they thought.
>
> *New life from old roots,* 1965

11.20 Friends who are unable to continue in their appointed role should ask to be released from service by the appointing body. The body should normally agree to this request, although effort should always be made to support Friends who are lacking in confidence or uncertain about whether they wish to be released:

> I would never have dreamed of volunteering for most of the posts for which I have been nominated. Usually, on being approached about a nomination, my response has been to doubt my capabilities and to wonder why on earth they would think of asking me. Of course, it may be that hard-pressed nominations committees have to 'take what we can get' … But I would also like to think that sometimes they have identified some potential in me that could be encouraged to develop through taking on a new role within the Quaker community. This is confirmed to me by the fact that I can't think of a single Quaker 'job' that I have regretted taking on; even though some were extremely challenging, I have always felt enriched by the experience overall. The support of the Friends whom one hopes to serve is crucial in this process; when I have felt upheld by the meeting, I have been able to trust that, with God's help, I will manage to be 'good enough'.
>
> *Towards the source,* 2014

Serving with joy

11.21 Our Quaker community needs each of us to be ready to serve in different ways at different times. Meeting the community's practical needs is a spiritual calling and a chance for our sense of belonging to develop.

11.22 Giving service in various roles is what has most contributed to my sense of belonging in the Religious Society of Friends and to my understanding of what being a Quaker (or at least being this Quaker!) means to me. Giving service has brought with it learning, challenges, growth, and sometimes joy.

I have served on various nominations committees and whilst this aspect of building our communal life together undoubtedly has its challenges, it can give joy. I have seen Friends, who were initially hesitant and unsure they were 'worthy to serve' (a phrase often given in response when they have been approached by a member of nominations committee) then go on to grow and flourish in their service. On occasions, Friends have come back to the nominations committee, to say that they are finding their service rewarding and enjoyable. There is the pleasure of hearing that the person is finding their service a positive experience, but there is also, implicit in that, a joyful affirmation of the committee's discernment on that occasion...

A wise Friend said to me a few years ago, 'Do what makes your heart sing.' I think that's good advice but I am learning that sometimes I don't know what that will be in advance. I am aware that my openness to 'leadings' is constricted by me wanting to stay safely in my 'comfort zone'. My experience, however, is that when I do open my heart to those leadings, by being willing to be open to the discernment of others regarding opportunities for service, for example, then I am enabled to play my part and sing not just my own song but join in that of the bigger Quaker choir.

Carolyn Sansom, 2021

For more on service, see 9: Service in the Quaker community.

Chapter 12:

Quaker meeting structures in Britain

12.01 A good, light, flexible... structure will give us time to listen for emerging concerns, and the energy and will to follow our leadings. But reaching this point depends upon our willingness to learn the relevant skills and to get the systems in place within our meetings... Good stewardship does not involve static adherence to the ways of the past. What matters is a firm understanding of the principles which underlie those ways, so that the Quaker essentials can be expressed in the changing circumstances of our place and time.

Christine A M Davis, 2008

Introduction

12.02 This chapter is about how Quakers in Britain are organised. It includes:

- The structure of Britain Yearly Meeting
- The Quaker theology underlying our structures
- Area meetings
- Local meetings
- Worshipping groups
- Wider regional, and national and other groupings
- Quaker recognised bodies
- Yearly Meeting
- Centrally managed work and witness of Quakers in Britain

The structure of Britain Yearly Meeting

12.03 All the recognised Quaker meetings in Britain together form Britain Yearly Meeting, or more formally Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The formal structure of Britain Yearly Meeting includes:

- local and area meetings
- certain regional and national groupings with wider responsibilities
- committees and bodies appointed by Yearly Meeting
- Yearly Meeting itself.

These meetings and bodies have specific responsibilities for representation and communication within the structure.

There are other Quaker groups and meetings in Britain outside the formal structure that do not have those specific responsibilities. They also play a valuable part in our Quaker life and witness.

This basic structure developed from the origins of the Quaker movement in seventeenth-century Britain and has evolved over time in response to changing circumstances.

For each of the parts in the structure, this chapter focuses on the core Quaker principles underpinning their current form, relationships and activities. Details of the individual bodies (including their names, specific roles, terms of reference, membership, and practical guidance on legal requirements and good practice – all of which might change over time) can be found in separate supplementary material (the Resources) that can be updated as needed.

For details of the individual Quaker bodies, see the Resources.

The Quaker theology underlying our structures

Why Quaker structures matter

12.04 Being a Quaker is being part of a gathered, guided and ordered people. Becoming a Quaker means joining a community, not simply expressing personal commitment to a set of principles or attitudes. This membership implies mutual responsibility:

> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.
>
> 1 Corinthians 12:14, 26
> (New Revised Standard Version)

We make decisions and act together as Quakers locally, regionally and nationally. Quaker meetings are linked by local, regional and national structures. These enable and express our responsibility and accountability to each other.

To be a Quaker is to belong to some particular, ongoing community of Quakers. This community is grounded in worship and sustains long-term relationships of mutual responsibility. Normally, in Britain, being a Quaker means being a member of:

- a local meeting or worshipping group
- an area meeting
- in some cases, a regional meeting
- in Scotland or Wales, the wider meeting covering that nation and
- Britain Yearly Meeting.

Gospel order

12.05 The term 'gospel order' is often used to refer to the local, regional and national structures of Quakers in Britain and the processes by which they operate. The term comes from the insight of early Quakers that God, whose Spirit led them into these radically new forms of religious organisation, is 'not a God of disorder, but of peace' (1 Corinthians 14:33, New International Version). Faithfulness to the leadings of the Spirit will bring us into a new way of ordering our lives. This new way involves flourishing communities, deep relationships with the Spirit and with each other, truthful understanding of the world, and collective action that advances peace and justice. Our structures and processes, however imperfect and fragile they are, are a small part of this renewed order.

How different parts of the structure relate to each other

12.06 Meetings have different responsibilities for different parts of the life and work of Britain Yearly Meeting, appropriate to their scope and size, as explained later in this chapter. The responsibilities and the relevant authority belong to the meeting for worship for business, which all members of that meeting may attend.

When we gather as a local meeting for discernment and decision-making, we are gathering too as part of the larger Quaker bodies to which all of us belong. So, for example, the corporate work of a local meeting is also part of the corporate work of the area meeting and Britain Yearly Meeting.

In session, Yearly Meeting has a particular and weighty responsibility – for discerning what the whole body of Quakers in Britain is led to do and be. No other Quaker gathering can do that.

12.07 Our organisation and structures as Quakers in Britain arise from, and support, our understanding of community, discernment and mutual responsibility.

Every meeting needs to undertake its own discernment on the matters before it at the time. It does so in the context of its relationships to the

whole Quaker body. A meeting might genuinely be led to do something different from what the rest of the Quaker body is doing. In such a situation, it is important to reflect on what this meeting's decision will mean for the whole Quaker body and relationships within it. Being part of a whole does not always mean reaching the same conclusions or acting in the same way. It does mean listening to other meetings and being mindful of their needs and responsibilities.

How authority works in Quaker structures

12.08 The source of all authority in Quaker communities is the guidance and direction of the Spirit. We give, and use, authority within the larger pattern of mutual responsibility within the Quaker community. We do this as we are gathered by the Spirit into a community and learn to be faithful as a community. Thus, discernment of divine guidance as a community is at the heart of how we give and use authority.

Quaker decision-making processes, our Quaker business method, all have the same aim. That aim is maintaining the community's faithfulness to divine guidance, and hence its living connection to the ultimate authority by which we act. A Quaker meeting gathered for worship and discernment can give authority to specific members and groups within it, to carry out specific responsibilities. When the meeting gives authority to them, it does so in faithfulness to divine authority.

12.09 The extent of a gathered meeting's authority depends upon its place in the structure. The respective authorities of a local meeting for worship for business, an area meeting for worship for business, and the wider regional or national meetings (including those in Scotland and Wales, and Yearly Meeting in session) are set out in later parts of this chapter and in other constitutional documents.

Minutes from a meeting for worship for business record its decisions following the leadings of the Spirit. They express the authority of the meeting in a particular matter, for its members and constituent meetings.

12.10 To support transparency within our Quaker organisation and to make sure that meetings and groups are clear about the extent of their authority, it is helpful to document specific responsibilities and relationships. This can be done in documents such as terms of reference and memoranda of understanding.

Trust

12.11 The exercise of authority depends on trust. This means:

- trust in the Spirit
- trust in our structures, that they provide the opportunities needed for the Spirit to be heard
- trust in our processes, that they will lead us to a right understanding of the Spirit's guidance for our community
- trust in each other, that we will be faithful in following our processes and listening to the Spirit.

Having such trust means, for example, that Quakers can accept the authority of a meeting for worship for business at which they were not present.

Area meetings

General functions of area meetings

12.12 The area meeting is the basic Quaker organisational unit within the formal structure of Britain Yearly Meeting. The area meeting is responsible for, and brings together, local meetings and worshipping groups within a defined area. Each local Quaker meeting must be recognised by an area meeting in order to be part of our structure. Area meetings are usually the part of the structure where Quaker membership is held.

Area meetings gather in regular meetings for worship for business. They support local meetings, develop and maintain Quaker community in the

area beyond the local meetings, enable the shared testing of concerns, and communicate with the wider Britain Yearly Meeting structure through representatives and minutes. They often have responsibilities for finance, property and other resources.

Duties of area meetings towards the Quaker community in their area

12.13 Each area meeting must ensure that local meetings in its area hold regular meetings for worship (including for business) and that they have suitable arrangements for spiritual and pastoral support and for safeguarding.

For more on meetings for worship for business, see 8: How Quakers make decisions. See also10: Spiritual and pastoral care and 11: Nominations. For guidance on safeguarding and notifying Britain Yearly Meeting of changes to local meetings, see the Resources.

Duties of area meetings relating to membership

12.14 The area meeting handles applications for membership, transfers of membership between area meetings, and terminations of membership. It must keep a register of members and attenders (including children). It is responsible for supervising and recording Quaker marriages, for recording deaths of members, and for the proper conduct of funerals, burials and memorial meetings. Area meetings may prepare testimonies to the grace of God shown in the lives of deceased Friends.

For more on these duties, see 14: Quaker marriage, 15: Quaker approaches to death and dying and 18: Membership.

Duties of area meetings towards the wider Quaker meeting structure and the world

12.15 Area meetings may be required to provide information or nominations to Britain Yearly Meeting or to other parts of the Britain

Yearly Meeting structure. They are responsible for the proper stewardship of any financial or property resources they hold. They make arrangements to encourage and collect financial contributions from Friends towards the area meeting and its local meetings, and to channel contributions towards the work of Britain Yearly Meeting and other Quaker bodies.

12.16 Area meetings must comply with relevant laws. These include laws concerning marriages, burials, charities, safeguarding of children and adults at risk of harm, data protection and privacy, finance and property, and employment. Some area meetings have combined with others to form regional groupings with a shared charitable structure and trustee body.

Area meetings should reach agreements with each local meeting, trustees and other relevant bodies as to how respective responsibilities in these and other matters are to be fulfilled. These agreements should be recorded in memoranda of understanding.

12.17 Area and local meetings, like other parts of the Quaker meeting structure, need our financial support to enable them to carry out their responsibilities. We are all responsible for supporting our meetings financially, according to our circumstances.

See also 13: Stewardship and trusteeship.

Organisation, roles and appointments in area meetings

12.18 Each area meeting must ensure that Friends are appointed, following its nominations processes, to carry out the following roles to fulfil its core functions and duties:

- clerking
- custody of records
- nominations
- spiritual and pastoral support

- registering of marriages
- safeguarding of children and adults at risk of harm
- treasurership
- trusteeship, where the area meeting is a separate single charitable entity.

Friends appointed to these roles should have a demonstrated commitment to their Quaker community and a good understanding of Quaker practice. For some roles, membership may also be required, either by Britain Yearly Meeting or by the governing document of the relevant charity.

12.19 Area meetings often also find it helpful to appoint Friends to provide:

- clerking to deal with and record membership matters
- support or assistance with treasurership tasks, and with the collection and channelling of financial contributions
- compliance with data protection requirements
- advocacy for and work with children and young people
- outreach
- care of premises and wardenship where appropriate
- advice on funerals.

12.20 Area meetings should meet for business regularly. All members of the area meeting may attend; non-members may attend with permission.

See also 9: Service in the Quaker community, 10: Spiritual and pastoral care, 11: Nominations, 13: Stewardship and trusteeship, 15: Quaker approaches to death and dying, 18: Membership, and 25: Sharing the Quaker way. For guidance on making appointments and notifying Britain Yearly Meeting, see the Resources.

Local meetings

General functions of local meetings

12.21 A local meeting is a community of Friends in a particular locality. It meets regularly for public worship and other activities. It is recognised by, and is subordinate to, the area meeting.

The membership of a local meeting consists of members of the area meeting who are recorded by the area meeting as attached to that local meeting. Non-member attenders and children attached to a local meeting may also be recorded as such.

Each local meeting should hold regular meetings for worship for business. All members of the local meeting may attend these meetings; non-members may attend with permission.

Specific duties and responsibilities of local meetings

12.22 Local meetings are responsible for holding public meetings for worship as well as meetings for worship for business. They look after the spiritual and pastoral needs of their community, including children and families, and provide opportunities for spiritual development and learning about the Quaker way.

Some local meetings will need to make arrangements for other matters, such as outreach, custody of records, safeguarding, premises, finances, financial contributions, and links with other local churches and faiths. Local meetings must comply with relevant laws.

The local meeting, the area meeting and the relevant trustee body should agree and document how all the responsibilities related to local meetings are fulfilled. This could include sharing responsibilities with the area meeting or another local meeting.

Local meeting roles

12.23 Each local meeting must, on its own or in collaboration with

another meeting, appoint Friends to clerk meetings for worship for business, deal with correspondence and oversee financial matters as needed.

Local meetings often find it helpful to appoint Friends to other roles, including work with children, care of premises, care of the library, collecting and channelling financial contributions, hospitality and domestic arrangements, and welcoming and door-keeping.

For more on appointments to Quaker roles, see 9: Service in the Quaker community and 11: Nominations.

Worshipping groups

12.24 Some area and local meetings look after informal worshipping groups of Friends and others that are not recognised local meetings.

Wider regional, national and other groupings

Meetings covering Scotland and Wales

12.25 Quakers in Scotland and Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales are part of the formal structure of Quaker meetings in Britain. They have national responsibilities, on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting, to represent and advance the life and witness of Quakers in their respective nations. Their main responsibilities include:

- promoting spiritual life and witness, facilitating contact between Friends, and providing opportunities for training and mutual support
- encouraging communication by constituent area or local meetings on matters deserving exchange of views
- representing Britain Yearly Meeting in their respective nations and acting on its behalf in relation to church and faith groups, other public and voluntary bodies, and government

- representing their respective nations to Britain Yearly Meeting, including through certain other meetings in the structure and by communicated minutes.

Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales, which is for all Friends who live or worship in Wales, has an additional role in responding to issues relating to living in a bilingual society.

For more on Quakers in Scotland and in Wales, and Quaker material in the Welsh language, see the Resources.

General Meeting of Young Friends in Britain

12.26 General Meeting of Young Friends in Britain (formerly known as Young Friends General Meeting) is part of the formal structure of Quaker meetings in Britain. It is open to young adult Quakers in a defined age range, who need not be formal members of Britain Yearly Meeting. It meets for business several times a year and arranges other events for young adults. It represents them through certain other meetings in the structure and by communicated minutes.

For more on General Meeting of Young Friends in Britain, see the Resources.

Regional groupings

12.27 There are some regional groupings of meetings that are not part of the formal structure. Their purposes include broadening Quaker fellowship and fostering spiritual support, learning, friendship, and collaboration. They have various internal structures, levels of formal organisation, meeting arrangements, and ranges of activity.

For more on regional and general meetings, see the Resources.

Quaker recognised bodies

12.28 Other Quaker groups, not necessarily geographically based, exist to pursue particular topics or concerns. These are independent groups of Friends and others who explore a common interest, seek affirmation or carry out witness outside our formal structures.

Some of them are Quaker recognised bodies. They are recognised as Quaker organisations because their Quaker roots are important to their identities and they uphold Quaker testimony and practices. There is a process for their recognition but they are not part of the formal structure.

These groups are encouraged to, where possible, work with parts of Britain Yearly Meeting to share skills and strengthen Quaker worship and witness. All such groups or bodies using the name 'Quaker' or 'Friends' in their title should, however, make clear that their work and witness are not formally part of Britain Yearly Meeting's corporate activity.

For more on Quaker recognised bodies, see the Resources.

Yearly Meeting

Background

12.29 Quakers from across Britain have gathered together almost every year since 1668 in meetings for worship for business:

> 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.
>
> London Yearly Meeting, 1668

Constitutional position of Yearly Meeting

12.30 The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in session is the final constitutional authority of the Society. It is commonly known as Yearly Meeting. It is at the heart of the formal structure of Quaker meetings in Britain. Geographically it covers England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man. Its membership consists of all those who belong to the area meetings in those places. All members of Britain Yearly Meeting may attend and take part in its deliberations.

12.31 The primary purpose of our Yearly Meeting is to discern the leadings of the Spirit for the spiritual life, work and witness of Quakers in Britain. We do this by gathering Friends together, in one or more sessions each year, for learning, worshipping and discerning. Through that discernment, we seek to make decisions and respond to calls for action for Quakers in Britain.

12.32 At Yearly Meeting, we foster our individual and corporate spiritual life and witness. We test and review concerns, consider reports on our centrally managed work, and discern our way forward.

Yearly Meeting may authorise public statements on behalf of all Quakers in Britain. Yearly Meeting's other responsibilities include maintaining our Quaker constitution, recognising bodies as part of our structure, and keeping a record of Friends brought before the courts or imprisoned for matters of conscience.

For more on discernment and concerns, see 4: Quaker discernment.
For more on the constitution of Yearly Meeting, see the Resources.

12.33 In 1999, the then Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee wrote:

> We see Yearly Meetings as events in the life of the institution of Britain Yearly Meeting which can involve:
>
> - constitutional decision-making;

- annually overseeing and guiding the stewardship exercised between Yearly Meetings;
- settling policy on major areas of work or witness;
- promoting teaching and learning;
- offering inspiration and leadership;
- celebrating together;
- re-dedicating ourselves;
- calling us to action;
- creating and sustaining a community, including those both under and over nineteen.

Yearly Meetings are also occasions in which we can learn, practise, improve, and take back to our local meetings ways of conducting business which are rooted in Quaker tradition and our own experience yet also meet contemporary challenges. They should be a focus for every facet of Quakerism, constantly reminding us of what it means to be a Quaker today.

We are aware that we do not always achieve these purposes in our Yearly Meetings as well as we might; and indeed that it may not be possible to fulfil all the purposes to an equal extent at an individual Yearly Meeting. Seeking the right balance at any one Yearly Meeting is a necessary though difficult task. Our experience is that Yearly Meeting is most fruitful when its programme includes some decision-making and 'doing together', alongside more reflective sessions; and when it focuses on doing what only Yearly Meeting can do.

Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, 1999

12.34 Other Friends have reflected on the experience of a rightly held Yearly Meeting, as shown in the following extracts.

12.35 Yearly Meeting is not, in the last resort, made up of a body of experts. People who know a great deal about the matter in hand may do most of the talking, central committee members familiar with the complexities of translating convictions into practical terms may appear to be leading the meeting. But a few halting yet sincere hesitations, uttered by a Friend from a small meeting... may, in fact, be of more significance in revealing a matter in its true setting than all the sophistication of the committee worthies. Again and again on deep issues it is reality as known and experienced by the simple and single-minded meeting, that does not know too much to have lost its simple faith, that guides the Society.

Roger Wilson, 1949

12.36 No organisation or planning can produce a good Yearly Meeting if those who attend come for an inadequate reason. When the Religious Society of Friends gathers for its annual assembly, it does so because it seeks to come to know the mind of God on the various affairs to be brought forward... We are ordinary people, with the shortcomings of ordinary people, and there is laid upon us the necessity of patience with one another in all our gatherings, and especially in Yearly Meeting, and the willingness to accept the imperfect arising from our human limitations. When therefore we find our Yearly Meeting falling short of the standard which it should reach, whether in worship or in deliberation, it behoves each of us to listen more intently for the voice of the Spirit, and to seek the more earnestly that every contribution, be it by spoken word or in silence, is that which is in accord with the divine leading. In our worship at Yearly Meeting, it is laid upon us with special weight to listen. It is not our ministry that is required in worship, nor our inspiration in deliberations, but we seek to hear the true word of God speaking through our frail humanity

and leading us to the place where he would have us be. This is the right holding of Yearly Meeting.

Right Holding of Yearly Meeting Committee, 1960

Attendance at Yearly Meeting

12.37 Mary Hughes, a Quaker around the turn of the twentieth century, came with heart and mind prepared:

> Anyone who lived with her during April and May knew how intensely Friends' Yearly Meeting was on her mind. It was as important to her as 'going up to Jerusalem'. For weeks beforehand it came into her prayers in the morning, at meal times and with friends. She wished that God's power would be in the meetings, that people would go forth from them with a new vision of God's work for them, a new sensitiveness towards their fellows, especially the distressed.

Rosa Hobhouse, 1949

12.38 All members of Britain Yearly Meeting may attend sessions of Yearly Meeting. Children and young people are included in Yearly Meeting in age-appropriate ways. Permission for the attendance of non-members at one or more sessions may be given at the discretion of the Yearly Meeting clerks.

Members of the Society not belonging to Britain Yearly Meeting but to another yearly meeting may attend sessions of the Yearly Meeting by prior arrangement. Friends in sojourning membership of an area meeting in Britain are exempt from this requirement.

Visitors from other churches or faiths may also be invited to attend sessions.

For details on the arrangements for permission and attendance at Yearly Meeting, see the Resources.

12.39 To work well, Yearly Meeting needs to have:

- sufficient numbers and diversity of those attending
- continuity of discernment
- engagement
- connection and communication with Friends locally.

Area meetings and certain other bodies are accordingly asked to appoint named persons as representatives to attend Yearly Meeting sessions regularly over a defined period.

For details on the appointment arrangements, appointing bodies, schedule, and guidance, see the Resources.

Serving Yearly Meeting

12.40 Yearly Meeting, following its nominations processes, appoints its clerks. It may also appoint committees and groups to carry out other functions supporting the holding of Yearly Meeting, such as agenda planning, nominations and epistle drafting.

Documents of Yearly Meeting

12.41 The agenda for Yearly Meeting is discerned by a planning committee. The agenda and any related documents for consideration are published in advance and made available to all Friends. Friends are encouraged to make time not only for individual study of the agenda and documents but also for consideration of them in local and area meetings and other gatherings. The minutes of Yearly Meeting, and any epistle agreed by it, are published after the meeting.

For more on how Yearly Meeting is organised, see the Resources.

Centrally managed work and witness of Quakers in Britain

Background

12.42 Our Quaker work and witness are carried out at local, area, regional, and national levels. This centrally managed work and witness of Quakers in Britain are discerned, governed, funded, and carried out as set out in 12.44 onwards. They are done on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting and all its constituent meetings and members. We all own it, and should support it, as our corporate work and witness.

See also 5: Quaker testimony and 19: Spiritual roots of Quaker witness.

12.43 Our centrally managed work and witness cover four broad areas:

- organising and maintaining the whole of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain (the church)
- supporting Friends in their local, area and other meetings
- raising awareness and developing understanding about Quaker faith and practice, within and beyond the church
- putting into practice at home and abroad Quaker thinking and testimony, including matters such as peace, truth and integrity, simplicity, community, environment, and sustainability.

These areas are reflected in the charitable objects of the registered charity of Britain Yearly Meeting and set out in its governing document.

How the work and witness are decided, governed and carried out

12.44 Within the four areas listed in 12.43, the broad shape and strategic framework and priorities for our centrally managed work and witness are discerned and reaffirmed by Yearly Meeting in session. Our Britain

Yearly Meeting trustees (see 12.46–12.47) are part of the Yearly Meeting in session and advise it on these matters. The trustees operationally plan and oversee the discerned work and witness. They are advised by our staff (see 12.49–12.50) and committees and other bodies.

The trustees are accountable to Britain Yearly Meeting and also to the charity regulation authorities. Various committees and groups may advise on and guide the details of the work and witness within their areas of responsibility. They report to the trustees and through them to Britain Yearly Meeting.

12.45 Britain Yearly Meeting employs staff to carry out much of its centrally managed work and witness. We should all aim to contribute financially to this work, according to our financial circumstances. This can be done either directly or through collection by area or local meetings:

> Friends need to be more explicit and robust in considering the practice of giving money as well as service for the building up of the community. The spiritual roots of this go deep – 'And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need is met.' (Acts, 2:44–45, from *The message*)
>
> Wealth is a relative term – depending on how we choose to look at it, we have much, or little, or just enough. Part of our spiritual deepening is to recognise what we have.
>
> Wealth confers privilege: making choices, taking control, exercising power. These things are good in themselves, but our over-reliance on them will blunt our ability to reach beyond our own small world, grow in the Spirit, and continue to build the Commonwealth of Heaven on Earth. With privilege comes greater responsibility for the welfare of the community. There is joy and freedom that comes from divesting ourselves of too much power and influence, and in seeing the fruits of our gifts, or trust[ing] in what may come of them after we have gone.

> Donating is not only a matter for the individual – our corporate bodies also have a duty of sharing their wealth with sister Quaker structures that may have less, and a duty to encourage a culture of generosity and giving among their members and attenders.
>
> Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, 2025

See also 13: Stewardship and trusteeship.

Britain Yearly Meeting trustees

12.46 Our trustees support Britain Yearly Meeting by providing it with advice and dealing with the detail in relation to the centrally managed work and witness. In law, they are the responsible trustees for the work, witness, assets, and property of Britain Yearly Meeting. They hold the legal powers and duties of trustees of the charity. In particular they are responsible for:

- the right stewardship of the work, witness, finances, assets, and property
- the general control and management of the administration of the affairs of Britain Yearly Meeting
- legal compliance and financial propriety
- employment of staff, including determining recruitment arrangements, pay, and terms and conditions.

12.47 The trustees' responsibilities are set out in the governing document of the charity, approved by Yearly Meeting in session and by the charity regulation authorities. They are described in more detail in the trustees' terms of reference, again approved by Yearly Meeting. Our trustees are members of, and appointed for time-limited periods of service by, Britain Yearly Meeting, following its nominations process. They are accountable for the conduct of their responsibilities. They report regularly to Yearly Meeting in session and separately to the charity regulation authorities.

In carrying out their responsibilities, the trustees recognise and listen carefully to the discernment of Yearly Meeting in session. They ensure that this discernment is followed, within legal, financial and other constraints.

For more on Britain Yearly Meeting's trustees, see the Resources. See also 13: Stewardship and trusteeship.

Committees

12.48 Yearly Meeting in session, and Britain Yearly Meeting's trustees with Yearly Meeting's consent, may set up or lay down committees. Committees bring specialist knowledge and expertise, enthusiasm and commitment, and a Spirit-led approach to discerning details of our work and witness. Some committees have an open-ended remit; others are set up for a time-limited period to complete a specific task. If a committee is set up by Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting's approval is required to lay it down or significantly change its functions.

For more on committees, see the Resources.

Recording clerk and staff

12.49 The recording clerk is the senior employee of Britain Yearly Meeting. The role may include:

- leading the staff
- acting as secretary to Yearly Meeting and Britain Yearly Meeting's trustees, servicing those bodies, and ensuring that their work is carried out
- being 'keeper and interpreter' of our church government
- maintaining contact with meetings throughout Britain Yearly Meeting
- representing Britain Yearly Meeting to certain outside bodies.

The office of recording clerk has existed since the mid-seventeenth century, when it was initially concerned with recording the sufferings and work of early Friends. Its responsibilities have changed over time.

12.50 Britain Yearly Meeting's trustees, advised by the recording clerk, set the organisational structure, recruitment arrangements, pay, and terms and conditions of all the staff. On behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting, they carry out its responsibilities as employer, acting consistently with Quaker testimony and complying with employment law and good practice.

For more on the role of recording clerk, see the Resources.

Chapter 13:

Stewardship and trusteeship

13.01 Each one of us is called to use the gifts that are our talents and assets wisely and well. In our meetings we exercise this stewardship as a community, seeking to use our money and buildings with openness, accountability, transparency, and integrity to build a flourishing spiritual life that nurtures all its members and benefits the wider community.

Quaker Stewardship Committee, 2015

Introduction

13.02 Stewardship means using our resources to support the life and witness of our communities, as well as holding them in trust for those who come after us. Good stewardship ensures we have the right resources for our Quaker community, now and for the future.

As Quakers, we live under divine guidance, as individuals and as communities. We see the whole of life as sacred and our resources as part of the divine creation. Our care of them is therefore a sacred trust. Faithful stewardship of our resources can help towards building the divine commonwealth on earth.

This chapter includes:

- Responsibility for stewardship
- Our resources: property
- Our resources: money
- Our Quaker church and its charities
- Quaker trusteeship
- Being a Quaker employer

Responsibility for stewardship

13.03 Stewardship of our resources involves all of us. Our resources include the physical assets and financial resources owned by our charities, but also the time, dedication, skills, and knowledge of Friends. Stewardship includes taking care of people and treasuring the diversity of gifts they bring. The well-being of the people in our communities should be a priority when we make decisions about managing property and finance.

To be good stewards, we should know where our money comes from and be ready to take part in discernment about the use of our resources. We appoint some Friends to take on specific duties of stewardship and act on our behalf, but we all share responsibility for ensuring that sound structures support this work. We can draw inspiration for this from Young Friends General Meeting:

> What resources do we have to make the changes we'd like to see? Our time, enthusiasm, skills, [and] communities were all suggested. And all these things are resources: things we can draw upon, but also things we have to manage and husband, things that will run out if pushed too far. But our book of discipline constantly connects our action in the world to the Spirit which leads us and nourishes us. We do not manage the Spirit; we do not store it up; it does not run out; it does not fail. Our own energy and skills are finite. Our ability to understand and care for others is finite. Our pain and hurt are finite. But the Spirit is endless; love is endless. It is the living water. This is why we always believe that there is a way forward. This is what permits us the most radical of hope.
>
> Young Friends General Meeting, 2020

For more on Quaker processes for appointing Friends to take on specific duties, see 11: Nominations.

Our resources: property

13.04 Quakers can worship anywhere. We do not rely on special buildings or places. However, property is a useful resource that can support our worship and witness.

Meeting houses

13.05 There is value in having our own buildings. They not only give us space for our own worship and activities but can also be a resource for the wider community. Having a physical presence can help us to be visible and give us opportunities to reach out to the local community.

Quaker meeting houses need care to keep them in good order and ensure they comply with all legal requirements. This can be a drain, not just on the financial resources of a meeting but also on Friends' time and energy. It is useful for meetings to regularly review the benefits of having a property against the costs of doing so. In some cases, a review might conclude that it would be better to give up ownership of the building so that both money and energy can be released for other purposes.

We want our Quaker communities to be open and inclusive. Meeting houses should be accessible for people with disabilities and include space for children and families. Sometimes the constraints of a particular building make this difficult or impossible. This might become a reason to consider alternative premises.

13.06 At Britain Yearly Meeting in Canterbury in 2011, Quakers in Britain made a commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. This has implications for how we manage our meeting houses. There is often ongoing work needed to make them more sustainable:

> The action we are ready to take at this time is to make a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. This will require a process to establish a baseline of

current witness and a framework in which individual Friends and local meetings can share their successes.

We need to allocate adequate resources to this process. This process needs to be joyful and spirit-led, with room for corporate discernment at local, area and national level. We believe this corporate action will enable us to speak truth to power more confidently. Growing in the spirit is a consequence of taking action, and action flows from our spiritual growth; here is the connectedness we seek. Only a demanding common task builds community.

Minute 36, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2011

Hired premises

13.07 Some Quaker meetings find that renting premises is a better option for them than maintaining a meeting house. Suitable meeting spaces can be hired just for the times they are needed, which does not have to be a Sunday morning. Some Quaker meetings hold their main weekly worship on a Sunday or weekday evening, and this can be more accessible for some people.

Sharing a space can also bring challenges. Extra care may be needed over safeguarding arrangements in shared premises. Storage of books and other materials may call for some imaginative solutions. Meetings may also need to give extra attention to publicising their location and times of worship.

Burial grounds

13.08 An area meeting, alone or in partnership with other area meetings, may own one or more Quaker burial grounds.

Quaker burial grounds:

- are primarily for burials of members and for scattering or interring members' ashes

- may also be used for non-members, at the discretion of the owning meeting(s)
- may be open for further burials or scatterings or interments of ashes, or they may be closed to further use (e.g. if full)
- should have markings and layout (such as headstones or plaques) consistent with Quaker testimony
- should be properly managed and maintained by the owning area meeting(s), or by a duly authorised trustee body, local meeting or other group
- when no longer required by the area meeting(s), should be disposed of according to prescribed procedures.

Some older meeting houses have historic burial grounds that are closed for interments. Meetings should be clear about the purpose of retaining these. Is it to care for Quaker history, provide a place for people to visit to remember the deceased, preserve the environment, or provide a peaceful space? The answer(s) to this question may help meetings to discern how and whether to retain ownership.

For requirements and guidance on Quaker burial grounds, see the Resources. For more on Quaker funerals, see 15: Quaker approaches to death and dying.

Other properties

13.09 Some area meetings manage property other than meeting houses or burial grounds. These have a wide range of uses. Meetings should be clear about the purpose of holding these properties. Does their current use support the work and witness of Quakers? Does the use of the property justify the time, energy and money required for its upkeep?

For guidance on managing Quaker properties, see the Resources.

Our resources: money

13.10 I have learned... that stewardship of our financial resources demands not only meticulous accounting skills, but also knowledge of what our money does, and imagination in devising what it can do.

Christine A M Davis, 2008

13.11 Without money, we could not sustain our work and witness in the world, or the structures that support our community. So far as possible, we should aim to contribute financially to our Quaker communities, including through legacies, so we can afford the work we are called to do. Our Quaker communities also need our service and willingness to maintain them. We give our time and energy to our community's worship, work and witness. It has no other hands but ours.

We should all aim to know how our financial resources are raised and used. Annual reports that are presented well can encourage Friends to contribute to Quaker work, but we should consider financial matters more frequently than once a year.

Raising funds is not an end in itself. Meetings should be wary of building up substantial reserves that are not put to use. Our reserves should cover known expenditure and include a contingency fund to meet unexpected demands, but the rest should be used to support Quaker work and witness.

We should all be aware of how our funds are invested and ensure this is consistent with Quaker testimony, avoiding harm to people and the environment. Quaker communities and organisations should aim to avoid fundraising and investment that are directly linked to warfare, fossil fuel extraction, sexual exploitation, gambling, tobacco, and alcohol. We are also becoming more aware that some of our inherited wealth is linked to an exploitative colonial economy and the enslavement of people. We can aim to use our resources in a way that benefits people and communities still affected by historical injustice.

Our Quaker church and charities

13.12 As Quakers in Britain, we are part of one church, the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. By 'church', we mean a religious community brought together through shared spiritual practice, insights and experience.

Our church is served by some structures explicitly linked to the church, such as local and area meetings for worship for business, and by many charities. The central charity, Britain Yearly Meeting, carries out our centrally managed work and reports to Yearly Meeting in session. Where an area meeting is part of a larger charity covering several area meetings, the trustees are accountable to the larger body. Where an area meeting is itself a charity, its trustees are accountable to that area meeting. There are also other Quaker charities covering broader geographical areas or with a particular focus. All these charities help the church to live out its testimony and make it possible for us to do the work we are called to.

All charities should have a governing document that sets out their purpose and in broad terms how the charity is to be run. For Quaker charities, this document reflects our Quaker insights and testimony. However, there are limits to what changes can be made: some changes to governing documents would need the agreement of the relevant charity regulator.

For more on church organisation, see 12: Quaker meeting structures in Britain. For more on Quaker charities, see the Resources.

Our charities: a brief history

13.13 From 1601 in England and Wales, religious bodies were recognised as charitable in law. In the late seventeenth century, the Religious Society of Friends was recognised as a religious body and automatically became a charity. Recognition of charitable status for religious bodies in Scotland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands was different, but by the twentieth century all parts of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain had charitable status. Charity law has evolved over time and Quakers have always been expected to follow it.

Until early in this century Quakers, like other religious bodies, had charitable status without the requirement to register. When this excepted status was removed, all religious bodies were required to register. We opted to register in a way that reflected our national and area church structures. As a result, Britain Yearly Meeting and most area meetings became registered charities.

As we are a religious body, our charitable status is not new and is not a consequence of the requirement to register. Ever since Quakers were recognised as a religious body we have had charitable status. In order to employ people, enter into contracts, hold bank accounts, and own property, we must have a legal identity as an organisation.

Charitable status brings benefits, such as tax concessions, as well as a legal responsibility for good governance. Good governance makes things work smoothly and with integrity, and helps us to carry out our work and witness.

Quaker trusteeship

13.14 In Quaker charities, trusteeship is a responsibility given to some Friends to act on behalf of the appointing body for a set time. Trustees are responsible for the governance of Quaker charities. They ensure that all legal requirements are met and that assets are cared for and used appropriately. Trustees also make the practical arrangements to carry out the discernment of the area meeting or other Quaker body.

All charities are required to have trustees. How they are appointed is described in their governing document. In the case of Quaker charities, this should normally be through a nominations process. Nominations committees should look for Friends with a sound grasp of Quaker practice and a good knowledge of the body appointing them. They should aim to consider all the people in the community who could offer service, so that our trustee bodies reflect the diversity of our Quaker communities. Those appointed to serve as trustees may be required to be members, either by Britain Yearly Meeting or by the charity's governing document.

Trustees do not all need to be experts in business, finance or legal matters, though between them they will need some financial skills, understanding of charity governance and knowledge of key areas such as safeguarding. They must be willing to give sufficient time to the work and to learn about and accept clearly defined responsibilities.

Trustees need to know that their work is understood and their actions supported by the meeting that appointed them. Trustees remain part of their area meeting or other appointing body and so share in its discernment and decision-making.

For more on appointing Quaker trustees, see 11: Nominations. For guidance on membership requirements for trustee roles, see the Resources.

What we expect of our Quaker trustees

13.15 Quaker trustees, like the trustees of all charities, act together as a corporate body. The role of Quaker trustees has two components:

- to make sure the charity meets its legal responsibilities
- to help put into action what the church has discerned in its gathered meetings.

This makes the role of our trustees rather different from that of the trustees of other charities. The ultimate responsibility for discernment rests with the church structures. There should be mutual responsibility between the meeting and the trustees. It is a close partnership, based on trust.

13.16 The specific tasks required of Quaker trustees are:

- to implement the discerned direction of the church from Yearly Meeting, area meetings or other church bodies
- to hold in trust the charity's money and property, and to act as employer of any staff

- to ensure the charity is solvent, well run, and working within the terms of its charitable aims and objects as described in the governing document
- to ensure compliance with legal requirements – not just with charity law but also with laws relating to employment, health and safety, data protection, safeguarding, and so forth
- to follow good practice in matters not covered by legislation
- to get professional expert advice when appropriate – this is particularly important when dealing with complex matters such as employment, buying or selling property, or building work
- to look ahead to future needs and to consider how these might be met – this strategic planning should be done by working together with the appointing meeting.

It is important that trustees are ready to warn of risks, shortfalls in funding or new legal requirements. It is equally important for them to recognise when things go well and to identify what helped this to happen. There are times when trustees need to act quickly to protect people, resources or reputation. They should then inform the meeting that appointed them of the actions they have taken.

13.17 Our trustees act on behalf of the appointing meeting and are accountable to it. Through their service they care for their meeting by dealing with practical matters that support the spiritual life of their Quaker community. The detailed work that our trustees do frees the time and energy of other Friends so they can give to different aspects of our work and witness in our own and the wider community.

Trustees should hold their meetings following the discipline of the Quaker business method. Their decisions should be recorded in minutes that reflect their discernment and that are available to their appointing body.

For more on the Quaker business method, see 8: How Quakers make decisions. For detailed guidance for Quaker trustees, see the Resources.

Being a Quaker employer

13.18 Spirit-led employment practice nurtures staff and creates an open and trusting relationship between employer and employees. This relationship acknowledges employees' needs for financial and emotional security both for themselves and for any dependents.

Lancashire Central and North Area Meeting, 2024

13.19 Trustees are the employers of any staff of a Quaker charity, with responsibility for complying with the requirements of employment law and good practice.

Being an employer can involve complex responsibilities. Trustees should be ready to use the expertise of Britain Yearly Meeting staff and also to pay for professional help when they lack relevant experience. If we act without professional advice, we risk making difficult situations worse for ourselves and for our employees.

As Quakers, we expect more of ourselves than simply complying with our legal obligations to employees. We also witness to our Quaker faith through our relationship with the people we employ. This means treating them with care and respect, and modelling Quaker ways of working and behaving.

For guidance on being an employer, see the Resources.

Chapter 14:

Quaker marriage

14.01 Never marry but for love; but see that thou lovest what is lovely. He that minds a body and not a soul has not the better part of that relation, and will consequently lack the noblest comfort of a married life.

Chuse one that measures their satisfaction, safety, and danger, by thine; and of whom thou art sure, as of thy secretest thoughts: a friend as well as a partner.

William Penn, 1682

Introduction

14.02 Marriage is a lifelong, unconditional and serious commitment. It is a spiritual union with important emotional, physical and legal aspects. It joins two people who promise to be and to stay a couple. The declaration of this commitment is made to each other, to the meeting, to the community, to society, and to God in a meeting for worship for marriage. The Quaker community also makes a serious commitment to support the couple on their journey. The couple are married in the care of the meeting and in accordance with the law.

From our earliest days, Quakers have stressed how central the meeting for worship is to our practice of marriage. It is in worship that promises are made in the presence of God. We see our form of marriage as an expression of the Quaker way. We each have a direct relationship with God, and the whole of life, including our intimate relationships, is sacred.

This chapter describes the Quaker understanding of marriage, the legal position of Quaker marriage and how a Quaker wedding works. It includes:

- The spiritual and legal basis of Quaker marriage
- Preparation before marriage
- The meeting for worship for the solemnisation of marriage
- The marriage declaration
- Declarations in other languages
- The Quaker wedding certificate
- Celebration of commitment
- Support for the couple
- Divorce and remarriage

The spiritual and legal basis of Quaker marriage

14.03 The writings of George Fox express our understanding of marriage as 'the work of the Lord':

> For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests' or magistrates'; for it is God's ordinance and not man's; and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together: for we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses.
>
> George Fox, 1669

14.04 In England and Wales, Quaker marriages were recognised as legal by the Marriage Act of 1753. Scottish law allowed marriages to take place without a priest, so Quaker marriage has always been lawful there. Because some of our early marriages were not recognised in law, we kept very careful records and made sure that everyone present at a wedding signed the certificate as witnesses.

Quaker marriage is equally available to all unmarried adult Friends, whether in formal membership or not, regardless of the sex or gender of the participants.

In a marriage, the couple are equal partners. With the help of God, their love for each other can deepen and grow in a lifetime together.

14.05 By God's grace we are a gift for one another, recognising that this person is the person with whom I can create a relationship that will deepen, grow and last a lifetime. This is the dimension within the relationship which earths us in the created world, connects us with the community and is open to the transcendent.

Roger and Susan Sawtell, 2006

14.06 Quakers believe that same-sex marriage is important because we believe that we are all equal, and because we believe the quality of the love we offer to our partners is the same as everyone else's. The true measure of an intimate relationship is its degree of selfless love, a love that isn't proprietorial or exploitative, but tender, responsible, committed, equal; a love that feeds its transforming messages of hope and happiness benevolently into society day after day.

Rosie Bailey, 2014

14.07 To make the marriage legal and so that proper records are kept, the couple and the meeting must follow the steps agreed by Britain Yearly Meeting that are detailed in the *Resources*. Each area meeting must appoint a registering officer who will make sure that weddings take place according to Quaker practice and the law.

Preparation before marriage

14.08 It is essential to prepare thoroughly for marriage. The couple and those supporting them should be clear that they have thought carefully about their future life together, are genuinely committed to a lifelong partnership, and have dealt with any problems or obligations from previous relationships. A meeting for clearness may be a useful practice as it allows a couple to explore these questions with a trusted small group of Friends.

When considering marriage in a Quaker meeting, the couple should approach the area meeting's registering officer as soon as possible, and well ahead of the proposed date for the wedding. Area meetings have responsibility for approving a request to hold a Quaker wedding.

For more on meetings for clearness, see 4: Quaker discernment.

The meeting for worship for the solemnisation of marriage

14.09 The meeting for worship for a Quaker wedding is held, like all our meetings, in silent waiting on the leadings of God. Ideally, in the meeting, the couple will gain help and inspiration to support them in their life together. It is a chance for those present to ask God's blessing on the marriage and to pray for the couple.

14.10 Thomas Ellwood, recalling his own marriage in 1669, wrote of the value of the meeting for worship:

> We sensibly felt the Lord with us and joining us, the sense whereof remained with us all our lifetime, and was of good service and very comfortable to us on all occasions.
>
> Thomas Ellwood, 1714

14.11 Quakers are clear that marriage is not just a civil contract but a religious act. Those who gather for the meeting for worship for marriage are witnesses, and they uphold the couple in celebrating their commitment to each other.

14.12 Catherine James describes a Quaker wedding in her meeting:

> Neuadd y Pentre'n llawn. Y waliau a'r ffenestri wedi trimio efo blodau gwyllt. Mwy o flodau ar y bwrdd yng nghanol y cylch. A dyma ni wedi ymgynnull mewn distawrwydd, i fod yn dystion i briodas. Y

swyddog cofrestru yno gyda'i phapurau i gyd, finnau yno fel henadur i gyflwyno'r broses i'r rhai oedd yn anghyfarwydd â phriodas yn null y Crynwyr. Y datganiadau yn Saesneg ac yna yn y Gymraeg – y ddau wrthi'n dysgu'r iaith, gan eu bod nhw wedi symud i fyw gyda ni yng Nghymru, ac yn bwriadu dod yn rhan o'r gymdeithas. Y distawrwydd yn dychwelyd, ac ambell un yn codi i weinidogaethu mewn awyrgylch o lawenydd. A dyma'r priodfab yn codi, i ddweud mor hapus yr oedd o i briodi ei wraig, ac yn awgrymu bod y ddau am ganu cân gyda'i gilydd, ac felly y bu. Yna, rhywun arall yn codi i'n harwain mewn cân – hyn i gyd heb ei drefnu. Ac ar y diwedd, pawb yn arwyddo'r dystysgrif oedd wedi ei chynllunio a'i phaentio gan y briodferch: tystion i un o'r seremonïau priodas hapusaf a brofais erioed.

The village hall was full. The walls and the windows were decorated with wild flowers, with more flowers on the table in the centre of the circle. And there we were, gathered in silence, ready to be witnesses to a marriage. The registering officer was there with all her papers, and I was acting as an elder to explain what would happen to those who were not familiar with Quaker marriage. The declarations came first in English, then in Welsh – they are both learning the language, as they have moved to live with us in Wales, and want to be part of our community. The silence returned, and people rose to minister in an atmosphere of rejoicing. And then the groom rose, to say how happy he was to be marrying his new wife, and to suggest that they sang a song together, which they did. Then, someone else rose to lead us in song – all this without prearrangement. And at the end, we all signed the certificate, drawn and painted by the bride: witnesses to one of the happiest weddings I have ever attended.

Catherine James, 2020

The marriage declaration

14.13 When the meeting for worship is gathered, and when they feel led, the couple stand if they are able. Taking each other by the hand, they exchange their declarations of marriage using one of the forms of

wording approved by Britain Yearly Meeting. They may speak in either order. The standard form of wording is:

> 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 Wales, the marriage declaration may be made in Welsh

> 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 ag y byddom ill dau fyw ar y ddaear.

The wording of this declaration is decided by Britain Yearly Meeting. There are some permitted variations in, for example, the language for 'spouse' and 'divine', and the use of pronouns. No other changes to the marriage declaration are possible. The choice of alternatives must be agreed in advance by the couple and the registering officer. The marriage of a couple is a legal contract from the moment both have made their declarations.

For more guidance on the marriage declaration, including permitted variations, see the Resources.

14.14 A Friend describes their Quaker wedding on Orkney:

> When we had removed the old car, the bits of engine, swept the floor and white-washed the walls, we began to believe we could be married in the barn at North Flaws. Flowers arrived from everywhere, wild flowers from the Moss, ragged robin, meadowsweet and wild irises, bunches of helse, roses, hanging baskets and pots of geraniums. But at the end of two days of preparation, Saturday evening was wet and we discovered that the usual Sunday morning ferry from John o'Groats would not be

running as the rudder needed maintenance. Several friends were relying on this ferry so we asked a local fisherman, but he was doubtful about tides and the wind, even if we could contact these various friends.

On the Sunday morning of 10th July we woke to rain beating on the windows but as people arrived the skies cleared and the boatman decided it was safe to cross.

Eventually at 12.00 in glorious sunshine our last guest arrived, sea-soaked but happy.

So the Meeting gathered as we marvelled at the fullness with which our prayers had been answered. There were about fifty of us, including Ernie Beyts, the registering officer from Aberdeen. The shafts of sunlight fell across the silent Meeting. After we had made our promises, we exchanged tokens of our love, an Orcadian ring and a wooden plaque on which there is painted a rose, and the words 'friendship, love, joy and kindness'. The blessed and carefully chosen words of friends were interspersed with the calls of the curlew, oyster catcher and common gull adding their blessing from the rooftop.

Anonymous, 1989

Declarations in other languages

14.15 Should one or other of the couple wish to use any language other than English or Welsh, there must be an interpreter present to affirm that the declaration is an accurate translation of the set wording. In these cases, the English or Welsh declaration should also be made.

14.16 It was an extraordinary meeting for worship – in three languages and in a packed meeting room. Tears flowed and laughter did too. The bridegroom was twenty-three and Welsh, the bride twenty-two and Swedish. Love and support flowed towards the pair as they each in turn made their promises in both Welsh and

in English. Others rose to speak of marriage and the journey of the Spirit; of Swedish Friends' love of the bride and of the public witnessing by all present of what was a reality already – the God intended partnership of the two.

Towards the source, 2014

The Quaker wedding certificate

14.17 At an appropriate point during the meeting, usually shortly after the declarations have been made, a previously prepared Quaker certificate confirming the declarations is signed by the couple and two or more witnesses. Only the wording approved by Britain Yearly Meeting may be used for the certificate.

The certificate is then read aloud, usually by the registering officer. After the meeting, it is customary for everyone present to be invited to sign the certificate. In this way, they all declare themselves as witnesses and offer their commitment to the care of the marriage.

Originally the Quaker wedding certificate was the only formal proof of the marriage. Nowadays it has no legal status, but it is often treasured as a record of the couple's commitment and the support of their community. After the meeting for worship has finished, the civil paperwork must be completed so that the marriage can be registered with the civil authorities.

For more guidance on the wording of the wedding certificate, see the Resources.

Celebration of commitment

14.18 Some couples may wish to have a meeting for worship in loving support of their commitment, without the legal requirements of a wedding. Such meetings are under the care of elders, but they should liaise with the registering officer so it is clear the meeting for worship does not confer the legal status of marriage:

I discovered I didn't mind in the least if the paperwork for marriage was done at the town hall; it was the Meeting for Worship with family and friends that would be our wedding.

Our wedding day was completely whole, entirely authentic for us. Our sons (his two, my one) were with us at the town hall, [along with] two friends who were our witnesses, my aunt, and his mother. The administrative ceremony was first thing in the morning, [then] we went for lunch in a cafe and then arrived to the Quaker meeting in the early afternoon. Our many guests had been advised to get a seat early and when we walked into the crammed meeting room a great silence of love held me in its purpose.

We made our vows, a close version of the Quaker words with him omitting the word God. There was some silence, much vocal ministry, laughter and tears. Our relationship was wrought together stronger through the mystery we experience in sitting together in a Quaker meeting. The strength of that mystery helps me every day, helps us, although the paperwork is also good to have.

Rosie Carnall, 2020

Support for the couple

14.19 The area meeting, and all its members, is responsible for upholding married couples as part of its responsibility for all Friends within its area.

Marriages are founded on love, truth and trust. However, in every relationship the couple may face differences and conflict. The meeting should be aware of the need for support in these difficult times and has a responsibility to be sensitively helpful to all couples.

14.20 True love is proven when the loved one begins to be not only the mysterious beckoner of destiny, but becomes also the occasion of dull indubitable duty. At a frontier of life when one partner begins to say to him- or herself: 'How can I love any longer? But I must love', then sometimes steadfastness and faith have power to nurse

into existence the new being needed as companion and lover. What a triumph when old love is transformed into a deeper surer new love which can accept more fully what each has, and the pair find a rebirth together in those things which are eternal, and through this a renewal of their every-day living.

London Yearly Meeting, 1959

For more on Quaker approaches to conflict, see 16: Conflict in Quaker communities.

Divorce and remarriage

14.21 Marriage should not be entered into, or left, lightly. One person cannot keep a marriage alive if their partner has withdrawn their commitment in whatever way. If all efforts at reconciliation and resolution fail, it may be right for the marriage to end. This means there is the possibility of remarriage. This can be a sensitive issue, and Friends should be aware of the pain and hurt of promises not kept. A second marriage may bring renewal, joy and comfort through the new relationship.

14.22 The simple Quaker wedding where the couple, together with their friends, gather in worship is for Friends the most natural setting for the two concerned to make a commitment to each other in the presence of God. With their declaration they take each other freely and equally as lifelong partners, committing themselves to joining their lives together in loving companionship, asking God's blessing on their union. Friends have always seen both members of a marriage as 'equal comrades'. With God's help their love for each other can deepen and change in a lifetime of marriage together.

London Yearly Meeting, 1994

For more on Friends' experiences of marriage and committed relationships, see 27: Love and loss.

Chapter 15:

Quaker approaches to death and dying

15.01 A ydych yn abl i ystyried eich marwolaeth a marwolaeth eich anwyliaid? O dderbyn marwolaeth fel ffaith, fe'n rhyddheir i fyw yn llawnach.

Are you able to contemplate your death and the death of those closest to you? Accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully.

Advices & queries / *Cynghorion a holiadau* 30, 1994

Introduction

15.02 We all know that one day our life will end. Part of living is therefore preparing to die. As Quakers, we focus on the way we live our life, while remembering to prepare, both spiritually and practically, for our death.

Funerals, memorial meetings and the writing of testimonies are spiritual occasions to celebrate a deceased Friend's life and ministry. They can also bring comfort and healing to those who mourn. As part of a Quaker community, we support our Friends as they approach the end of life and offer loving care to those who are bereaved.

This chapter includes:

- Spiritual preparation for death
- What happens after death?
- Practical preparation for death

- Pastoral care
- Quaker funerals
- Quaker memorial meetings
- Testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of deceased Friends
- Responsibilities of area meetings for testimonies

Spiritual preparation for death

15.03 We can all prepare spiritually for the end of our life. For some, this may include a renewed appreciation of the gift of the everyday, or confident hope in a life beyond.

15.04 I have been learning... that when we accept our finiteness realistically and without bitterness, each day is a gift to be cherished and savored. Each day becomes a miracle. I am learning to offer to God my days and my nights, my joy, my work, my pain, and my grief. I am striving to keep my house in order, and my relationships intact. I am learning to use the time I have more wisely... And I am learning to forget at times my puritan conscience which prods me to work without ceasing, and instead, to take time for joy.

Elizabeth Watson, 1979

15.05 Morale and spirits remain high because God has strengthened my faith, for I feel that it is simply the start of a new life. But I do get upset when I think of my relatives and friends who will grieve for me, so pray regularly that God give them the strength to overcome their grief with time.

I have learned that it is best not to concentrate on my troubles but to think about and pray for others... I feel privileged to share in the attitude of the Apostle Paul when he says: 'In whatsoever condition I find myself therewith to be content.'

Walter Martin, 1988

15.06 As I approach seventy, I need to think again about dying both practically and spiritually... When I was younger, I saw my life as a fast-flowing river, with me having to 'log jump' from one floating trunk to another as the rapids swirled around...

When I retired and life slowed down, the images gently but definitely changed to the river widening out and calming, so that I could sit on a raft and rest a little as I floated more smoothly downstream...

Whether it comes faster or slowly, it seems that eventually I will reach the sea – that wonder of continuous water, movement and space. I will merge my river into the great sea. I guess that is what death is now looking like to me.

I can live with that, I think.

Rosemary Daley, 2023

15.07 George Fox wrote shortly before his death:

I am glad I was here. Now I am clear, I am fully clear... All is well; the Seed of God reigns over all and over death itself.

George Fox, 1691

For more on Friends' experiences of ageing, see 28: Growth and change.

What happens after death?

15.08 Most Friends in former times were secure in their belief in an afterlife. In the late seventeenth century William Penn wrote:

The truest end of life, is to know the life that never ends. He that makes this his care, will find it his crown at last. And he that lives to live ever, never fears dying: nor can the means be terrible to him that heartily believes the end.

For though death be a dark passage, it leads to immortality, and that's recompense enough for suffering of it. And yet faith lights us, even through the grave, being the evidence of things not seen.

And this is the comfort of the good, that the grave cannot hold them, and that they live as soon as they die. For death is no more than a turning of us over from time to eternity. Death, then, being the way and condition of life, we cannot love to live, if we cannot bear to die.

They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill what never dies. Nor can spirits ever be divided that love and live in the same Divine Principle, the root and record of their friendship. If absence be not death, neither is theirs.

Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still. For they must needs be present, that love and live in that which is omnipresent. In this divine glass, they see face to face; and their converse is free, as well as pure.

This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal.

William Penn, 1693

15.09 Quakers today hold diverse views about what happens after death, including traditional Christian beliefs and a wide range of others:

There is no general Quaker view on the after-life. Quakerism is about how we live our lives in the here and now. This does not exclude a whole range of different beliefs about what happens after death. A few Quakers take a traditional Christian view of Heaven and Hell, others believe that some form of life continues but do not describe it in traditional terms. Others again remain firmly agnostic about death, maintaining that you cannot speak about something you have not experienced.

Harvey Gillman, 1993

Practical preparation for death

15.10 Preparing for our own death is important. We should make sure we have clear arrangements for distributing our property and caring for dependants, including a valid and up-to-date will. Thinking ahead may also include:

- ensuring that our wishes about resuscitation are known
- arranging powers of attorney well in advance of physical or mental deterioration
- making our wishes about funeral arrangements known to our meeting and relatives in advance.

Some Quaker meetings offer a way for us to record our wishes, which can be helpful to those planning our funeral. We might also include our preferences for practical and spiritual support while we are still alive, arrangements for our body after death, and any funeral or memorial meeting wishes.

15.11 Quakers do not have a collective position on assisted dying. Individual Friends hold a variety of views. For some, the sacredness of life means that assisting another's death is always wrong. Other Friends believe that avoiding suffering and extreme incapacity justifies assisted dying in some circumstances. Friends with clear preferences on any legally permitted aspects of these issues should make them known to their next of kin in good time.

For practical guidance on legal and other aspects of preparation for death, see the Resources.

Pastoral care

15.12 Quakers do have something very special to offer the dying and the bereaved, namely that we are at home in silence. Not only are we thoroughly used to it and unembarrassed by it, but we know

something about sharing it, encountering others in its depths and, above all, letting ourselves be used in it...

People so often talk of someone 'getting over' a death. How could you ever fully get over a deep loss? Life has been changed profoundly and irrevocably. You don't get over sorrow; you work your way right to the centre of it.

Diana Lampen, 1979

15.13 Being close to death can be a lonely and frightening experience. It may be an act of loving service to accompany someone in their final days, as a patient listener or simply being present at their bedside.

The strength of close relationships is tested at times like these, whether between the dying person and their immediate family, or within the Quaker community. Even a short visit from a Friend may bring a sense of companionship and spiritual comfort to all involved.

When supporting a person facing death, we are drawn into their wider community. We can be called to serve the needs of distressed friends and family, within the Quaker community and outside it. It may be helpful for bereaved Friends to seek out the pastoral care available within their own Quaker communities too.

Some Friends may be led to offer a Quaker presence as part of a volunteer chaplaincy team in a hospital or hospice. This can involve serving alongside chaplains of other faiths and ministering to patients, relatives and staff of different faiths or none.

For more on Quaker chaplaincy, see 9: Service in the Quaker community.

15.14 Sometimes religion appears to be presented as offering easy cures for pain: have faith and God will mend your hurts; reach out to God and your woundedness will be healed. The Beatitude 'Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted' can be interpreted this way too, but the Latin root of the word 'comfort' means 'with

strength' rather than 'at ease'. The Beatitude is not promising to take away our pain; indeed, the inference is that the pain will remain with us. It does promise that God will cherish us and our wound, and help us draw a blessing from our distressed state.

S Jocelyn Burnell, 1989

15.15 Following a death in the community, Friends may be affected in many ways. In some of our meetings, the deaths of very elderly Friends are a frequent occurrence. Those responsible for spiritual and pastoral care should be sensitive to the manner and timing of sharing the news with the community. Some Friends may need to be temporarily released from their usual Quaker service at this time, especially if they were close to the person who has died.

The sudden or unexpected loss of anyone in our community, especially children or young people, can be a harrowing experience. Grieving families may stay away from regular worship for a time, but it is important to let them know they are still held in the loving care of the community. While respecting any wishes expressed for privacy at this time, care should be taken to stay in contact with bereaved Friends. The offer of a call or visit may be welcome later. A deceased Friend's family may not be familiar with Quaker practices and care should be taken to be sensitive to their wishes.

For more personal experiences of Friends, see 27: Love and loss. For more on pastoral care, see 10: Spiritual and pastoral care. For guidance on sources of support with bereavement, see the Resources.

Quaker funerals

15.16 My local Quaker meeting is like an extended family, with the inevitable tensions and joys that that brings. I expect to be in this family forever. The disadvantage of belonging to a loving community for so long is that people I love die. No rite, however imaginative or well managed, can make that easy. Nonetheless

> Quaker funerals are the best possible way of celebrating a finished life together. Together in silence we thank God for the person's life and spirit. Whoever wishes may speak into the silence, remembering our friend. Sometimes this can be astonishing – I never knew that the man who fell asleep in meeting every week had been a skilled Morris dancer. Because we have a testimony to truth, we sometimes reference difficult experiences – no family is always perfect. But most of all we remember how much we love them; how much they loved us and what a wonderful example of the grace of God they were. I have been to many funerals in several denominations, but none that were so focused on celebration and love.
>
> Nuala Watt, 2023

15.17 Quaker funerals are meetings for worship that may accompany burials or cremations of deceased Friends. They are spiritual occasions to give thanks for the life of the deceased person, through silent worship and spoken ministry. They can offer spiritual comfort to relatives and friends, and may also be opportunities for celebration of a life well lived.

Quaker funerals should be simple and dignified. They may take place in a crematorium, burial ground, meeting house, or other appropriate settings, such as a woodland burial site. There are no specific legal requirements for Quaker funerals, in contrast to Quaker marriages. However, Quaker funerals are subject to the laws applying to all burials and cremations in the relevant nations of Britain.

15.18 Area meetings are responsible for the right holding of Quaker funerals in their area. They may authorise arrangements to be made on their behalf by local meetings or by appointed groups of Friends.

Each area meeting should appoint:

- one or more Friends to give advice to relatives on funeral matters
- one or more Friends, or a local meeting, to make arrangements for Quaker funerals, whether these take place in a Quaker burial ground or elsewhere.

Area meetings may find it helpful to prepare written guidance for their own use about arranging Quaker funerals, based on local experience and circumstances. They should keep such guidance under periodic review. The guidance should cover the matters listed below and ensure that those responsible for arranging funerals are practically well prepared and sensitive to the needs of those attending.

To enable the right holding of a Quaker funeral, those responsible should:

- liaise with all those who need to be involved in the arrangements – they should be aware of the need for sensitivity if a deceased Friend's expressed wishes about funeral arrangements conflict with the preferences of the bereaved
- agree whether the meeting for worship is to include any programmed elements, such as readings, prepared contributions or music
- arrange for an appropriate Quaker presence at the funeral, especially if a significant proportion of the deceased's family and friends are not Quakers
- ensure that the practical arrangements meet the needs of all those attending, including those who are not Quakers.

15.19 Friends should come to a funeral with both heart and mind prepared. We want to experience a deep sense of communion with God and with one another, which we hope will comfort and strengthen those who mourn. There are at least two aims in our worship: to give thanks to God for the life that has been lived, and to help the mourners to feel a deep sense of God's presence.

Hardshaw East Monthly Meeting Elders and Overseers, 1986

15.20 Each burial in a Quaker burial ground must be authorised by a minute of the area meeting for worship for business. It must follow prescribed procedures and should form part of a register of burials, maintained in accordance with the relevant legal requirements.

The scattering or interment of ashes following a cremation may take place in a Quaker burial ground or other appropriate site. It may also be accompanied by a meeting for worship. The principles set out in this chapter for Quaker funeral meetings for worship apply here too.

For more on Quaker burials and cremations, see 13: Stewardship and trusteeship. For more guidance on holding a Quaker funeral, see the Resources.

Quaker memorial meetings

15.21 A Quaker memorial meeting is an opportunity to give thanks for the life and service of a deceased Friend. It is a public meeting for worship, including silent waiting on divine leadings and vocal ministry.

A memorial meeting is held separately from the funeral. It may be before or after the funeral, on the same day or another date. There is no time limit for holding a memorial meeting. It may take place in a meeting house or other suitable venue. More than one memorial meeting may be held in different locations – for example, when a Friend belonged to several Quaker communities.

The area meeting is responsible for arranging memorial meetings or for authorising a local meeting or other group of Friends to do so.

The right holding of a memorial meeting should follow the same principles as a Quaker funeral (as described in 15.16–15.19). To be mindful of non-Quakers in attendance, it is helpful for a Friend to briefly explain at the beginning of the meeting how it will be conducted, and how and when it will end.

15.22 We believe in the Society as a community – it is the Religious Society of Friends – and therefore it is fitting to attend the meeting for worship, to remember, to give thanks and to take leave of Friends who have died. It is the last service we can offer, a tribute of respect, and it matters to the Quaker meeting as it is

a service to them too, for it strengthens them. There is also need for the presence of others, and their attendance in a loving and sympathetic spirit is a very real ministry.

Anonymous, collected by Quaker Life, 2012

15.23 Quaker funerals and memorial meetings (often called meetings of 'thanksgiving for the grace of God as shown in the life' of the person who has died) are frequently happy and fulfilling occasions, held in the silence of worship. They usually take place in crematoria or meeting houses; sometimes both – first one and then the other. They tend to be as much Quaker as family affairs: indeed, I've been to some which have been bursting with people jammed into corners, sitting on the floor, perched on window sills, all expressing through the stillness of a Quaker meeting their feelings for someone who has been dear to them. Spontaneous ministry, spoken or sung by friends, gradually bestows on the occasion a unique form, shape and character. The unvarnished nature of Quaker worship gives everyone the space to respond to the promptings of love and truth in their hearts.

Geoffrey Durham, 2015

For more guidance on holding a memorial meeting, see the Resources.

Testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of deceased Friends

15.24 A written testimony for a deceased Friend is a record of thankfulness for the divine grace shown in their life. It is not a formal obituary or eulogy, but it may express something of the unique personality shown in their life and ministry.

15.25 Testimony concerning Thomas Ellwood (1639–1713):

He was greatly respected by his neighbours for his services amongst them; his heart and doors were open to the poor, both sick and

lame, who wanted help, and had it freely, taking care to provide things useful for such occasions... often saying, he mattered not what cost he was at, to do good.

He was an early comer to meetings, seldom hindered by weather (though he lived three miles distant) when bodily weakness did not hinder. The monthly meeting was held at his house about forty years, and he always looked very kind and courteous on Friends, when they came there, and took care and notice of the meanest, who came in sincerity.

Upperside Women's Monthly Meeting, 1714

15.26 Testimony concerning Sally Mason (1943–2015):

From an upbringing with humanist parents, Sally came to Quakers in her teens, through friendship with a girl who lived next door. Throughout her life, she experienced both the pain and benefits of being different, in her gay sexuality as well as through illness.

She had to overcome inner barriers as well as negative attitudes in coming to terms with this. In her late forties, after the death of her long-term partner Jacquie, she also knew what it was to suffer the grief of bereavement. From these experiences, Sally gained the inspiration and courage to enable others to reach acceptance in their turn, with her Quaker activities always a part of this healing process...

Friends knew Sally... through her long service with the Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship (QLGF), valuing her as National Contact, her willingness to listen and her faithfulness as letter-writer...

In reflecting on the grace of God as shown through these many connections in Sally's life, these themes shine through: her sense of humour, her love of language and writing, her commitment to Quaker faith and practice, and her courage.

Sally's way of living her faith daily drew others closer to the Quaker family. Her ministry was very much at the practical rather than mystical end of the faith spectrum...

Her life was a testimony to the Quaker Way.

Gloucestershire Area Meeting, 2016

15.27 Testimony concerning Christine Davis (1944–2015):

Christine Davis' life manifested an extraordinary range of competencies. She had a warm personality, which was just as effective in a large gathering ('Dear Friends...') as it was one-to-one; she had a measured way with words, which was especially suited to the crafting of Quaker minutes; she had the listening skills and imaginative responses which enabled her to discern the way forward for a meeting, even in the most intractable of situations...

She was proud of the achievements of Scottish Quakers, and, when the Quaker tapestry came along in the 1980s, she was an early participant, working on two panels which celebrated the publication of Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* in 1676 and the winning of the right not to swear oaths by the burgesses of Aberdeen in 1714. To a lifetime of public service, Christine brought a clear mind, a passion for good governance and a drive for change...

Her memorial service filled Dunblane Cathedral. It was impossible not to recognise and respond to the love and empathy which she brought to all her relationships. She herself recognised the source of that love: 'I am in love with life and with God; I can only do with that love what I do with other love, which is to warm myself with it as I give it to others; it is not mine to possess but to pass on.'

West Scotland Area Meeting, 2017

For more on the lives of Friends, see D: Our Quaker life journeys.

Responsibilities of area meetings for testimonies

15.28 Area meetings should record the deaths of their members in their minutes. Local meetings and other Quaker communities may also choose to do this for members or attenders, perhaps including a short reflection on the Friend's life.

15.29 Area meetings are also responsible for deciding whether to prepare a testimony to the life of a deceased Friend. They should discern this with the help of a recommendation from a local meeting or those responsible for spiritual and pastoral care. A local meeting or one or more named Friends should be appointed to draft the testimony. The draft testimony should be brought to the area meeting for approval and inclusion in its records.

Where a deceased Friend belonged to two or more area meetings during their lifetime, these meetings should agree which of them will take responsibility for producing the written testimony. Each of them may contribute towards drafting it.

If a written testimony is likely to benefit a wider group of Friends, or the Society as a whole, the area meeting may forward it to a relevant general or regional meeting, or to Britain Yearly Meeting. This should be a discerned and not automatic decision. It should reflect the inspirational value to Friends more widely of a testimony showing divine grace in a life of witness and service.

For more guidance on preparing testimonies for deceased Friends, see the Resources.

15.30 Not all lives of Friends are recorded in written testimonies. Over many generations, Friends have led faithful lives that remain unknown outside the immediate circle of their friends and loved ones. Our 1959 book of discipline included a reminder of the many lesser-known Friends whose beautiful and generous lives have gone unacknowledged in our formal records. It ends with the wish:

If only we could have shown them all!

But then in honesty we should have had to reveal also the extent of our failure, the light dimmed in narrow hearts and creeds, the baptism of grace lost in timidity and torpor, the corrosion of arrogance and self-satisfaction – for we have known these, too.

May the light prevail over the darkness, may those who are here speak for all the children of the Light, to the needs of other times as well as to their own.

Christian faith and practice, 1959

Chapter 16:

Conflict in Quaker communities

16.01 In our desire to be kind to everybody, to appear united in spirit, to have no majorities and minorities, we minimise our divisions and draw a veil over our doubts. We fail to recognise that tension is not only inescapable, however much hidden, but when brought into the open is a positive good.

Kenneth C Barnes, 1984

Introduction

16.02 In any community there will be conflict at times. People have diverse characters and backgrounds, and different ideas and expectations of each other. As Quakers, we should not be afraid of our differences, as they bring richness to our life together. It would be a dull community if we all agreed about everything. Disagreements can become conflict when people's needs or values are in opposition.

Conflict is not always harmful. However, if it is ignored or handled poorly, it can hurt individuals and damage the community.

Working through conflict can also strengthen our Quaker communities. Conflict may be an opportunity for growth, learning and change if we approach it with sensitivity and care.

This chapter includes:

- The spiritual basis for our response to conflict
- Some common areas of conflict
- The effect of avoiding conflict
- Approaches to resolving conflict

- When no resolution is found
- Support for working with conflict

The spiritual basis for our response to conflict

16.03 As Quakers we aim to recognise the Light in ourselves and in other people. We see the whole of life as sacred, including even our most difficult relationships. We aim to live under divine guidance, instead of being determined to get our own way. We are open to ourselves and others being changed by new understanding. These insights are at the heart of our response to conflict.

Building a healthy community that can hold difference in harmony is a long-term commitment. It takes time to develop mutual understanding, care and trust. Through practising the Quaker way together, we may grow in trust that the Light will guide us through times of disagreement and division.

Some common areas of conflict

16.04 We should expect any group of Quakers to have a range of views. If we are true to ourselves, we may find ourselves at odds with someone else. When this happens, it is important to listen and learn from one another. This is not always easy to do.

Some common areas of conflict that may be encountered in Quaker communities include those related to interpersonal issues; communication; authority and responsibility; disruptive, abusive or bullying behaviour; decision-making; theology; and use of resources.

Interpersonal issues

16.05 We are all drawn to some people and find ourselves at odds with others. This is not harmful in itself, but it has the potential to divide us into opposing groups, which can create and intensify conflict. We can all practise listening to people we would not usually be friends with.

Sharing our lives in community and working on common tasks can build surprising new connections with people who are very different from ourselves.

Communication

16.06 Effective and inclusive communication can be hard to achieve and mistakes are common. There are many reasons why communication may break down. Often it is because people have different communication styles or needs. Sometimes our choice of words can hurt and offend others.

We should aim to share sufficient information for everyone in the community to play an informed part in collective discernment. This may involve using multiple communication methods to meet the needs of different groups or individuals.

Social media is a powerful communication tool. When used well it can greatly aid communication, but inappropriate or insensitive use can be harmful. In the heat of the moment it is easy to post things that are hurtful and unfair. There can be a temptation to respond instantly, and this is rarely a good idea. What is posted online is likely to become a permanent record that may continue to cause hurt and harm. It may also spread details to a much wider group than is helpful for resolving a conflict.

Authority and responsibility

16.07 Quaker communities appoint some Friends to responsible roles, such as clerking, trusteeship or pastoral care, for a set time. Conflict can develop when role-holders or others in the community are unclear about the extent of their authority and responsibilities.

Conflict can result if some Friends do not recognise the authority that the community has entrusted to role-holders within their area of responsibility. Role-holders can also take too much upon themselves and go beyond the authority they have been given by the community.

We should trust the Friends we have appointed to carry out their responsibilities on our behalf. Friends in these roles should also be aware that they are appointed to serve the community and remain accountable to its collective discernment.

Those of us who are most confident or who have broad experience of the Quaker world should try to avoid assuming that what we have to say is most worth being listened to. Every person in a Quaker community has a measure of the Light and can bring new insights. Everyone should feel able to speak without fear of ridicule or disrespect.

Sometimes a small number of Friends come to hold a dominant role in a Quaker community, as a result of long service, experience or confidence. This is likely to lead to conflict, as others in the community may feel excluded or ignored. Our practice of rotating roles among different Friends is meant to prevent anyone becoming entrenched in a position of authority, but this can break down when only a few Friends are willing to serve. We should all be ready to take a part in the running of our communities, even if we lack confidence or experience at first. Our willingness to learn Quaker practices will introduce fresh approaches and help to create a healthier community.

For more on roles in a Quaker community, see 9: Service in the Quaker community and 11: Nominations.

Disruptive, abusive or bullying behaviour

16.08 We aim to be welcoming and inclusive communities, but sometimes we encounter people who do not want to follow the ways we worship or organise ourselves as a community.

Our meetings for worship are public events, which can make them open to disruption. We can bar people from attending worship or put conditions on their attendance, for the safety and well-being of the whole community and the right holding of Quaker worship. During a meeting for worship, elders are responsible for responding to any disruptive behaviour, and everyone present should help by maintaining the stillness of worship.

Bullying and aggressive behaviour should have no place in a Quaker community, and all Friends have a responsibility to challenge it. Elders and pastoral carers carry a special responsibility to prevent harmful behaviour and maintain the discipline of our public worship and meetings for worship for business. This may include preventing a Friend from insisting on their own way against the discernment of the rest of the community. This responsibility can be challenging but may be necessary to protect the community from bullying or obstinacy.

For more on eldership and pastoral care, see 10: Spiritual and pastoral care.

Decision-making

16.09 Conflict in Quaker communities can arise when the Quaker business method is not properly used in decision-making. Friends are sometimes tempted to use methods that seem quicker or easier, such as making decisions by email or through informal discussions between a few 'key' people. People unfamiliar with Quaker practice may expect decisions to be made as in secular organisations, with minutes written and circulated afterwards.

These methods undermine communal discernment and can lead to some Friends feeling excluded from decision-making or unclear about what has been discerned collectively.

For more on Quaker decision-making, see 4: Quaker discernment and 8: How Quakers make decisions.

Theology

16.10 We each have our own experience and understanding of the Light and we use different language to describe it, including in vocal ministry. Conflict may arise if we cannot accept and respect other Friends' experience and language. We should all be encouraged to share our beliefs and experience in the language that is most meaningful to us.

When someone's words feel strange or difficult, we can try to lay aside our immediate reactions and listen for what those words mean to them.

For more on religious diversity among Quakers, see 3: Quaker theology and 17: Quakers worldwide. For more on vocal ministry, see 1: Quaker worship.

Use of resources

16.11 Our resources of time, energy and money are limited, and Friends have different ideas and priorities for using them. When someone feels strongly about a particular area of work or witness, it can be difficult if others do not share their conviction. Our Quaker practices of discernment, including testing individual leadings, offer powerful and well-tried ways to work through differences and find unity, even amid deep disagreement.

For more on Quaker leadings and concerns, see 4: Quaker discernment.

The effect of avoiding conflict

16.12 Our testimony to peace is not about avoiding conflict but being prepared to listen to views that do not coincide with our own, being prepared to seek the truth in what we hear, and being open to the possibility that our views might change. We need more courage to open tricky conversations.

Christine Habgood Coote, 2022

16.13 As Quakers, we often hesitate to address tensions in our community. We may not want to upset other people and so avoid difficult conversations. In these situations, a conflict may be hidden but it is still alive.

Avoiding conflict often feels easier in the short term, but it can cause lasting harm. When disagreements are ignored, our collective discernment practices no longer work, because they rely on open sharing of different

insights. If differences remain unspoken, communities become stuck and unable to change and adapt.

We all need the courage to speak truthfully and carefully about difficult issues. If we are not truthful in our dealings with each other, our community life is undermined. If we do not speak with care, then speaking out will only deepen the conflict.

16.14 I come back again and again in my own mind to this word Truth. 'Promptings of love and truth' – these two sometimes seem to be in conflict, but in fact they are inseparable. If we are to know the truth, we must be able to see with unclouded eyes and then we will love what is real and not what is duty or fancy. Once when I was in the middle of a difficult exercise of Quaker decision-making, I wailed to an older and wiser Friend, 'How can I speak the truth in love when I feel no love?' Her reply was, 'Unless you speak the truth there never will be love.'

Alison Sharman, 1986

16.15 At a time of conflict within London Yearly Meeting (as Britain Yearly Meeting was called then), Hannah Chapman Backhouse wrote to her friend Maria Fox about the importance of gentleness in situations of conflict:

> May we be clear of all railing accusations... I am sometimes almost as much afraid of myself and my friends as of those to whom I cannot feel united, lest in our creaturely zeal for the truth we should be giving it a wound when we are not aware of it.

Hannah Chapman Backhouse, 1837

Approaches to resolving conflict

16.16 A ydych yn parchu'r hyn sydd o Dduw ym mhawb, er y gall fod wedi ei fynegi mewn ffyrdd anghyfarwydd neu ynteu'n anodd ei ddirnad? Y mae i bob un ohonom brofiad neilltuol o Dduw a rhaid

i bob un ohonom ganfod sut i fod yn ffyddlon i'r profiad hwnnw. Pan fo geiriau'n ddieithr i chwi neu'n tarfu arnoch, ceisiwch synhwyro o ba le y daethant, gan ystyried yr hyn a fu'n maethu bywydau pobl eraill. Gwrandewch yn amyneddgar, a cheisiwch y gwirionedd fo i chwi yn naliadau pobl eraill. Gochelwch rhag beirniadaeth sy'n clwyfo ac iaith sy'n cythruddo. Peidiwch â gadael i gryfder eich argyhoeddiadau beri ichwi wneud gosodiadau neu honiadau annheg neu anwir. Ystyriwch y gellwch fod yn camsynied.

Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

Advices & queries / Cynghorion a holiadau 17, 1994

16.17 It is important to treat conflicts seriously, to deal with them promptly and to respect confidentiality where necessary.

Confidentiality may be important in resolving conflict, and care is needed to make sure everyone involved understands what is required. Problems may occur when some people involved in a conflict speak very openly while others do not. This can lead to people taking sides based on only part of the story.

16.18 We should remember that conflicts often have more than one cause, and avoid assuming that one group or individual is solely responsible for what has gone wrong.

Conflict often gives rise to strong emotions. There is a danger that people will be provoked into using aggressive language or behaviour. This is never helpful, and we should all remember our responsibility to speak the truth with love.

16.19 It can be helpful for Quaker communities to identify some Friends with the skills and experience needed for conflict resolution, before any specific problem arises. This group can respond quickly to prevent a conflict causing lasting damage to the community.

Approaches to resolving conflict might include:

- an informal session for Friends to listen to each other, share different views and explore possibilities
- a threshing meeting – this can help a community to understand different views when there are persistent tensions about a particular issue
- a formal mediation process – this would involve a trained and impartial mediator working with two or more people in conflict
- an opportunity for individual Friends to explore their feelings and thoughts with a trusted person – this could help them become aware of their part in a conflict and how they might act to move things forward.

All these methods should be led by someone with the appropriate skills and experience. They also require the willingness of those involved to take part with an open mind and a generous heart.

In situations of alleged bullying or abuse, it may not be appropriate to expect those directly involved to have face-to-face contact, and alternative approaches would be needed.

Many people live with the enduring effects of previous trauma. We should ensure that our conflict-resolution processes are sensitive to this and avoid re-traumatising those who take part.

For more guidance on these and other approaches, see the Resources.

When no resolution is found

16.20 Pa beth yw Dyn?

> Beth yw maddau? Cael ffordd trwy'r drain
> At ochr hen elyn.

What is Man?

> What is forgiving? Pushing your way through thorns
> to stand alongside your old enemy.

Waldo Williams
(English translation by Rowan Williams), 1952

16.21 Sometimes we may have tried all the ways we know to deal with conflict in our community and still have failed to reach unity. In these situations, we can hold ourselves and each other in the Light and pray for healing and forgiveness. This may take time, but it can bring new insights, allow healing and soften strongly held views. When we can no longer trust ourselves or other people, we can trust in the Light to guide and change us.

We should also recognise our limits. Quaker communities are not professional therapeutic organisations. It may be better to concentrate on what we can offer: love, friendship and perhaps support to find professional help.

16.22 A Friend reflects on their experience of supporting a meeting through a long-running conflict:

> Eventually, after more unsuccessful attempts to make progress, area meeting elders and pastoral friends met with this as the sole item on the agenda. It was one of those meetings that brings tears to the eyes. We heard the pain that was still felt, the fear that the meeting would be damaged, the love that Friends felt for each other and their meeting. It was possible to write a minute accepting

that normality had to be restored but it also needed to recognise that that was not the end of the matter. A group was appointed to make themselves available to listen confidentially to anyone who struggled with the decision. They did their work over the following months, and then were laid down. And this was when I learned that we have to listen, and listen, and listen some more. It is not enough to still ourselves to hear how we are to move forward, and to hear that of God in each other. We have to hear each other, and not just until we hear what we want to hear but beyond that until we're getting the full human stereo.

Anonymous, 2025

Support for working with conflict

16.23 No Quaker community should have to struggle on its own to work through conflict. There are many sources of support available, including Britain Yearly Meeting staff and experienced Friends in other meetings.

If a conflict goes beyond the local Quaker community into the legal or public domain, we should seek advice from Britain Yearly Meeting staff or other professionals. If we try to tackle such complex problems without professional advice, we risk making matters worse and damaging the reputation of Quakers as a whole.

For more guidance on working with conflict, see the Resources.

Chapter 17:

Quakers worldwide

17.01 In the world family of Friends there is a rich variety of experience, some of which is unfamiliar to Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting. Some Friends make frequent and joyful use of song and Bible study, and may be led by a pastor; for others silent waiting on God is the basis of worship, from which vocal ministry develops. Many Friends have a vivid experience of personal salvation through the teaching, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; many hesitate to express their deepest spiritual experiences in words. It is important that Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting be aware that we are part of the world Quaker community, that we have a responsibility to learn about Friends in other parts, and that this can be done in local meetings as well as among yearly meetings.

Quaker faith & practice 9.02, 1994

Introduction

17.02 Britain Yearly Meeting represents only a small minority of Friends worldwide. Most Quakers have different forms of worship and theology from Quakers in Britain, but we share a common spiritual heritage. By sharing our diverse perspectives, we can discern how God is leading us as a worldwide community of faith.

This chapter is about the community of Quakers throughout the world. It includes:

- Our shared heritage
- Differences in theology and worship
- Visits between yearly meetings (intervisitation)
- How Quakers work together worldwide

Our shared heritage



17.03 Our worldwide Quaker communities all trace their spiritual roots back to the experience and teaching of early Friends. The first Quakers believed that everyone had the possibility of a direct relationship with God, who would guide them in all they said and did. They rejected priests and sacraments, but they believed the Bible confirmed what was revealed to them by the Inward Light of Christ. Early Friends were called to spread this message throughout the world:

> Let all nations hear the word by sound or writing. Spare no place, spare not tongue nor pen, but be obedient to the Lord God and go

through the world and be valiant for the Truth upon earth; tread and trample all that is contrary under…

And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.

George Fox, 1656

17.04 The first Quakers carried their message to many countries. Later Friends continued this practice, with missionaries travelling from Britain and the United States to establish Quaker communities throughout the world.

For more on the spirituality of early Quakers, see 2: Quaker spiritual experience and 29: Quaker history.

Differences in theology and worship

17.05 A ydych yn croesawu'r amrywiaeth mewn diwylliant ac iaith a mynegiant ffydd sydd o fewn ein cyfarfod blynyddol ac yn y gymuned fyd-eang o Gyfeillion? Ceisiwch gynyddu eich amgyffred gan elwa o'r dreftadaeth gyfoethog hon a'r ystod eang o ddirnadaeth ysbrydol. Cynhaliwch yn eich gweddïau eich cyfarfod blynyddol a hefyd gyfarfodydd blynyddol eraill.

Do you welcome the diversity of culture, language and expressions of faith in our yearly meeting and in the world community of Friends? Seek to increase your understanding and to gain from this rich heritage and wide range of spiritual insights. Uphold your own and other yearly meetings in your prayers.

Advices & queries / *Cynghorion a holiadau* 16, 1994

17.06 From the late eighteenth century onwards, Quakers became divided in theology. Some emphasised the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, while others looked to the Bible as their main authority.

Quakers in Britain, despite differences in theology, never split into different yearly meetings. In America, theological disagreements resulted in repeated separations, creating multiple yearly meetings with different forms of theology and worship. More recently, some previously separated groups have moved closer together again.

Quaker missionaries from Britain and America also brought their divisions and colonial attitudes to other parts of the world. It has taken Friends in some countries time to find their own expression of the Quaker way.

Leonard Sshivage, from East Africa Yearly Meeting, reflects on this history:

> The many Quaker cultures – Liberals, Evangelicals, Conservatives, ethical, and the like – cause confusion in the church in Africa and even elsewhere. The many missionaries who came to Africa from Quaker families gave their own individual messages as from where they came from [and their] cultures... We are struggling to [make] our house to come to one unity in Christ Jesus.
>
> Leonard Sshivage, 2010

17.07 As a result of missionary activity from various Quaker traditions in diverse cultures and circumstances, communities worldwide now emphasise different aspects of the Quaker way and have reached different discernment outcomes at different times on social issues.

Quaker worship in Britain and some other parts of the world usually has little formal structure and is largely based on silent waiting for God's leadings. This is often called 'unprogrammed' worship. Many Quakers in other countries have more structured worship, including prayers, scripture readings, hymns, and sermons, as well as periods of silence. This is sometimes called 'programmed' worship.

17.08 There are now three broad streams of Quaker tradition throughout the world. None of these are discrete and there are many overlaps:

- Evangelical or Pastoral Friends are by far the largest group of Quakers worldwide. They emphasise the authority of the Bible and the atonement and resurrection of Christ. Their worship is usually facilitated by a pastor and often involves Bible readings, hymn singing and personal testimony. Other members of the congregation also contribute to worship, including speaking without preparation during periods of silence. There are Evangelical yearly meetings in the Americas, Africa, India, and East Asia. Evangelical Friends in Africa are the largest and fastest-growing part of the worldwide Quaker community.
- Liberal Friends (including Britain Yearly Meeting) tend to be very theologically diverse, with influences from other religious traditions as well as nontheist perspectives. They practise largely unprogrammed worship and represent about 10 per cent of Friends worldwide. As well as in Britain, there are Liberal yearly meetings in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, southern and other parts of Africa, and the rest of Europe.
- Conservative Friends aim to maintain traditional Quaker practices, including Christ-centred unprogrammed worship. They give religious experience a primary role and rely on the Bible to confirm their direct spiritual experiences. They are based largely in North America and are the smallest branch of Quakers worldwide.

All these traditions share common roots that go back to the first Quaker communities. They all rely on the Quaker business method for decision-making and maintain an emphasis on Quaker testimony, practical peacemaking and personal integrity.

17.09 Early in the twentieth century, Churches and schools were established in Bolivia by Quaker missionaries from Ohio. But the Quaker tradition in Bolivia is very different from ours in Wales. I was invited to the La Paz Area Meeting where around 2,000 Quakers sang hymns in the

Aymara language and listened to a sermon from the pastor. Some called out and asked for forgiveness – a very different world from the quiet, unstructured meeting of Abergavenny! Nevertheless, I felt very comfortable in the company of Bolivian Friends. It's obvious that we have much in common, such as our testimonies and our emphasis on peace, and working in the community.

Towards the source, 2014

17.10 We are one. We are one in the spirit of God which does not wash away or hide our differences, but allows us to celebrate them and enables us to move beyond the spiritual boundaries that may separate us. We are able to do this by coming together in worship where, while its form may be unfamiliar, God was present throughout. Through listening deeply and tenderly to each other and to God we reached a place where we can hear and sense where the words come from even when we may not understand the tongue they are spoken in.

We are Friends. In making the choice to come together and be willing to share deeply, pray boldly, and listen lovingly together, we seek to move beyond our differences, see beyond our labels and find ways to connect with each other.

World Plenary Meeting, Písac, Peru, 2016

17.11 In 1985, over 300 young adult Friends from 34 countries and 57 yearly meetings produced an epistle that reflected their sense of the unity that embraces the worldwide Quaker family:

Our differences are our richness, but also our problem. One of our key differences is the different names we give our Inward Teacher. Some of us name that Teacher Lord; others of us use the name Spirit, Inner Light, Inward Christ, or Jesus Christ... We have been struck this week, however, with the experience of being forced to recognise this same God at work in others who call that Voice by different names, or who understand differently who that Voice is.

We have often wondered whether there is anything Quakers today can say as one. After much struggle we have discovered that we can proclaim this: there is a living God at the centre of all, who is available to each of us as a Present Teacher at the very heart of our lives. We seek as people of God to be worthy vessels to deliver the Lord's transforming word, to be prophets of joy who know from experience and can testify to the world, as George Fox did, 'that the Lord God is at work in this thick night'.

We call on Friends to rediscover our own roots in the vision and lives of early Friends whose own transformed lives shook the unjust social and economic structures of their day… And we call upon Friends across the earth to heed the voice of God and let it send us out in truth and power to rise up to the immense challenge of our world today.

World Gathering of Young Friends, 1985

For more on theological diversity within Britain Yearly Meeting, see 3: Quaker theology.

Visits between yearly meetings (intervisitation)

17.12 By visiting Friends in other yearly meetings and sharing worship with them, we can nurture friendships across our wider Quaker family:

Worshipping with European Friends is also very special. The groups I have visited have been small, and I've loved feeling connected to a family that stretches all round the world. I love learning about Friends' differing perspectives on the world in which we live, and marvel that such tiny groups manage to support and maintain loving worshipping communities. Would I manage to remain a Friend if, like one person I met in Finland, I am only able to worship with other Friends once or twice a year?

Mary Woodward, 2024

17.13 Adrian Glamorgan, from Australia Yearly Meeting, describes his first experience of taking part in Yearly Meeting in Britain:

> If you come from far away, especially if you come from the other side of the world, your first Yearly Meeting in Britain can amaze. A large venue holds the lovely silence of Quaker stillness, while hundreds listen to the Spirit. A conscientious table of Yearly Meeting clerks, recording clerk, and staff attend us. So many Friends!
>
> A Friend is called to speak. Humble words are offered. The hall listens with respect. Another Friend is called. Perhaps these words open a new direction. Quakers past are remembered. Silence deepens. Then a draft minute comes. Gradually, several stand. The meeting is not rushed. Then someone is called. This hour the auditorium seems well filled with wise Friends! On the matter before us, the sense of the meeting may be well found. Another time, there is more work to do.
>
> Besides clarity, a newcomer will encounter a complexity of committees, and processes, to bewilder ears. There is so much to learn. The presiding clerk may periodically untangle the acronyms. Or one Friend beside you may whisper an explanation. A new friendship is made.
>
> The joy is just outside, too. There are queues for food. New stories are discovered, and friendships fortified by the shared table and delighted conversation. We can encounter the variety and diversity of each other's spiritual journeying. We may take care not to overlook, or fall into societal assumptions. Each one has that of God in them. Give your listening, and curiosity. Share of yourself also, for your own journey may illuminate others.
>
> Friends from faraway places, where only a few seats make a modest circle of worship, can be struck with awe at your gathering. Their gratitude could be a signal for British Friends to see themselves anew, also.
>
> Adrian Glamorgan, 2024

How Quakers work together worldwide

17.14 After World War I, many Friends from different traditions found themselves working on the same humanitarian projects, and they overcame their differences to establish the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). Most yearly meetings throughout the world now belong to FWCC. It holds regular conferences and online events that bring most of the different strands of the worldwide Quaker community together for worship, friendship and shared discernment. It is through FWCC that Britain Yearly Meeting takes part in international ecumenical and interfaith work.

By worshipping, sharing and discerning together, we develop an understanding of what unites us despite our differences.

17.15 This... World Gathering will only serve God's will if we share with all our home communities the experience we have glimpsed of where unity can be found, not in creed or method but in glad acceptance of one another... Through facing our fears and grappling with conflict, we have discovered that true listening is always an act of faith... We affirm our vision that God is calling us to live out the faith that we can have community without uniformity; we can rejoice in the distinctive gifts of Friends from all traditions.

Fifth World Conference of Friends, 1991

17.16 Friends have often found that gathering with Quakers from other yearly meetings, cultures and traditions has opened their minds to new insights and perspectives:

> In this joyous gathering, we have expanded our understanding and appreciation for who we – as Quakers – really are. What a gift. Despite our multitude of differences, we have celebrated that we share not only our Quaker founders... but also deep Friendship, an openness to new Biblical interpretations, our structures and processes, our deep commitment to peace and justice, our love of the Earth, and our love of God.

> The variance in our perspectives, some large, some small, have become more apparent, at times painfully so. We have been able, with God's blessing, to resolve some tension through compassionate conversation, while some was simply held in our midst. We are not discouraged.
>
> Healing begins with sharing our stories, telling the truth, and listening deeply. There are truths which are uncomfortable to hear about Quaker involvement and complicity in past and present injustice. We need to build, or rebuild, trust. We pray that in trying to do the right thing, we do not do further damage. We draw inspiration from the Bible and our Quaker values of equality, truth, peace, and justice.
>
> Friends World Committee for Consultation World Plenary Meeting, 2024

17.17 World gatherings of Friends also provide an opportunity for shared discernment about global challenges, drawing on the insights and experience of Quakers from different continents. At the Sixth World Conference of Friends in 2012, the Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice was approved as a collective statement of the worldwide Quaker movement. Part of that text reads:

> We have heard of the disappearing snows of Kilimanjaro and glaciers of Bolivia, from which come life-giving waters. We have heard appeals from peoples of the Arctic, Asia and Pacific. We have heard of forests cut down, seasons disrupted, wildlife dying, of land hunger in Africa, of new diseases, droughts, floods, fires, famine and desperate migrations – this climatic chaos is now worsening. There are wars and rumors of war, job loss, inequality and violence. We fear our neighbours. We waste our children's heritage.
>
> All of these are driven by our dominant economic systems – by greed not need, by worship of the market, by Mammon and Caesar.

Is this how Jesus showed us to live?

- We are called to see what love can do: to love our neighbor as ourselves, to aid the widow and orphan, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, to appeal to consciences and bind the wounds.

- We are called to teach our children right relationship, to live in harmony with each other and all living beings in the earth, waters and sky of our Creator, who asks, 'Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world?' (Job 38:4)

- We are called to do justice to all and walk humbly with our God, to cooperate lovingly with all who share our hopes for the future of the earth.

- We are called to be patterns and examples in a 21st-century campaign for peace and ecojustice, as difficult and decisive as the 18th- and 19th-century drive to abolish slavery.

We dedicate ourselves to let the living waters flow through us – where we live, regionally, and in wider world fellowship. We dedicate ourselves to building the peace that passeth all understanding, to the repair of the world, opening our lives to the Light to guide us in each small step.

Sixth World Conference of Friends, 2012

17.18 Quaker organisations such as the Quaker United Nations Office and the Quaker Council for European Affairs also work internationally to support peacebuilding and international cooperation. This work includes providing confidential opportunities for representatives from nations in conflict to meet and find common ground:

When we offer Quaker process to others, the results can be amazing. The Quaker United Nations Office [QUNO] has been doing exemplary work at the UN climate negotiations. In the three

> years leading up to the 2015 Paris agreement, QUNO held dinners to which delegates from all the major negotiating blocs were invited. They were invited to listen to each other responding to questions that are not normally asked in the negotiations, for instance about their personal hopes and fears, how climate change would affect their home countries and their feelings about the process.
>
> Laurie Michaelis, 2017

This work is slow and often unacknowledged, but it can build the trust needed for better international negotiations through patient listening and long-term dialogue.

For more on Quaker conciliation, see 22: Our peace testimony. For more on the Friends World Committee for Consultation and other international Quaker organisations, see the Resources.

Chapter 18:

Membership

18.01 *This chapter will describe our understanding of formal membership of Britain Yearly Meeting. It will include current processes for becoming a member, and transferring or terminating membership.*

At the time of writing, some aspects of the membership process are being reviewed. The text will take account of any changes agreed by Yearly Meeting in upcoming sessions.

Part C:

Our Quaker faith in action

Introduction

C.01 The Quaker way becomes visible through our actions, as our witness in daily life and in shared work for social change. We are called to live our faith in every part of our lives and to share the Quaker way with others.

Much of our lives is in relationship with wider society. We engage with secular organisations such as charities, government bodies, public services, and businesses. We also live within a multifaith society. In all these contexts, we are invited to consider how we live and share the Quaker way.

C.02 The chapters in this part of the book explore how Quakers live our faith in daily life and engage with wider society, including in situations of conflict or injustice.

Chapter 19 – Spiritual roots of Quaker witness explores how we are led to act for the flourishing and peace of the world. Through these actions, we witness to God's leadings and express our collective Quaker testimony in our own circumstances.

Chapter 20 – Witness in daily life describes how we are led to witness in our personal lives. It shares some Friends' experiences of witnessing through their relationships and way of life.

Chapter 21 – Witness with others describes how Friends are witnessing with others in response to the crises of our times, including forms of witness that challenge authorities and power structures.

Chapter 22 – Our peace testimony describes Quakers' collective commitment to peacemaking and rejection of violence. It shares some

of the actions Friends have been led to take as their witness for peace, including conscientious objection, disarmament and peacebuilding.

Chapter 23 – Quakers and wider society discusses how we live our faith in our relationships with secular organisations such as employers, businesses, public services, and the state. It describes how we may be led to challenge laws or institutions that contradict our Quaker testimony.

Chapter 24 – Quakers and other faith communities describes our ecumenical and interfaith relationships, and the connections between Britain Yearly Meeting and other churches.

Chapter 25 – Sharing the Quaker way explores how we invite seekers to discover the riches of Quaker practice and community. It describes how we can share generously what we have found and welcome newcomers into a sense of belonging.

Chapter 19:

Spiritual roots of Quaker witness

19.01 We need both a deeper spirituality and a more outspoken witness. If our spirituality can reach the depths of authentic prayer, our lives will become an authentic witness for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, a witness which becomes the context for our prayer. Out of the depths of authentic prayer comes a longing for peace and a passion for justice. And our response to violence and injustice is to pray more deeply, because only God can show us the way out of the mess that the world is in. And only God gives us the strength to follow that Way.

Gordon Matthews, 1989

Introduction

19.02 Quaker witness is the action we are led to take to embody God's purposes for the world.

Witness can be a part of our everyday lives, when we choose to simplify our lifestyle or speak truthfully in a difficult situation. It is also the action we take to challenge situations of injustice, whether alone or with others.

Through our actions we witness to God's leadings. Quaker witness is for peace, integrity, and the flourishing of humanity and the whole of creation. This often requires us to witness against violence, injustice and oppression.

Different kinds of witness are often grouped into themes such as simplicity, truth, peace, equality, and sustainability. These words remind us of the qualities of the beloved community we are called to live out and invite others into, but there are no clear distinctions between them

in practice. Truthfulness, integrity, simplicity, equality, and peace are all inter-related in a whole way of life, which is our response to the leadings and transforming power of God.

Chapter 5: Quaker testimony discussed the collective testimony that we have discerned together over time throughout Britain Yearly Meeting. This includes our shared commitments to opposing war, supporting refugees and working for climate justice. The current chapter describes the specific actions that Friends are led to take, which express Quaker testimony in their own circumstances. We refer to these as acts of Quaker witness.

This chapter includes:

- Testimony and witness
- Responding to leadings
- Being faithful

Testimony and witness

19.03 Testimony is not a form of words but the cumulative lived witness of Friends in day-to-day life.

Pam Lunn, 2011

19.04 Quaker testimony is our message to the world, which is built up from the leadings of individual Friends, discerned in community and handed on over time. This collective testimony is expressed in our actions as individuals and communities.

The specific actions Friends are led to take, which express and embody Quaker testimony, are acts of witness. Witness is a challenge to ourselves and others. Acts of witness make our collective Quaker testimony visible in particular situations. They aim to address that of God in others and they call for a response.

19.05 We are called to make our lives patterns and examples, expressions of Quaker testimony. Our relationships with others are part of this. Answering that of God in everyone is not just a matter of 'seeing the good' in people. It means openness to being transformed by our relationship with them – being answerable to that of God in them.

Laurie Michaelis, 2017

19.06 Gofynnodd (Iago) y cwestiwn 'Pa les i rywun ddweud fod ganddo ffydd ac yntau heb weithredoedd?' Ffydd heb weithredoedd sydd farw. Dyna efallai gonglfaen arall i Grynwyr heddiw, sef fod yn rhaid i ni weithredu i dystio i ffydd; yn hynny o beth gallwn unioni ein hunain â'r hyn ddywedwyd am Tom Nefyn (gweinidog Presbyteraidd) gyda'r sylweddoliad, y rhan amlaf ein bod yn ddiffygiol ac yn methu. Ymdrechwn ymdrech deg, ac felly y nod a phregeth pob un ohonom yw ceisio defnyddio ein hunain er gwellhad a sancteiddrwydd yr holl fyd:

Ac o'i bregethau i gyd
Y fwyaf oedd ei fywyd.

(James) asked the question, 'What use is it for a man to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it?' Faith without deeds is death. This is perhaps another cornerstone for today's Quakers, that we need to act to witness to our faith; in this we can align ourselves with what was said of [Presbyterian minister] Tom Nefyn, realising that most of the time we fall short and fail. We make a real effort, so that the aim and the message of each of us is to try to use ourselves for the betterment and the sanctity of the whole world:

And of all his sermons
The greatest was his life.

Gethin Evans, 2025

See also 5: Quaker testimony.

Responding to leadings

19.07 Acts of witness are a response to God's leadings. Our witness is rooted in our openness to being led, in our worship and in our discernment. Witness is our response to God's call to act in the world.

19.08 Whatever situation we are in, we have a capacity deep within us to see the truth of our situation, to wake up to who we are and where we are, and to do what we know in our hearts to be the right thing.

Rex Ambler, 2013

19.09 Therefore the main thing in religion is to keep the conscience pure to the Lord, to know the guide, to follow the guide, to receive from him the light whereby I am to walk; and not to take things for truths because others see them to be truths, but to wait till the spirit makes them manifest to me.

Isaac Penington, 1660

19.10 Our experience of Quaker worship changes us. It can give us new insights into the spiritual condition of the world and how we are called to live in it. This renewed vision makes us more sensitive to the suffering of others and the destruction of the natural world. It may also reveal humanity's potential to live in peace with each other and with creation. Quaker witness arises from this new sensibility and seeks to share it with others.

19.11 Our Gracious Creator cares and provides for all his Creatures. His tender mercies are over all his works; and, so far as his love influences our minds, so far we become interested in his workmanship, and feel a desire to take hold of every opportunity to lessen the distresses of the afflicted and increase the happiness of the Creation.

Here we have a prospect of one common interest, from which our own is inseparable, that to turn all the treasures we possess into the channel of Universal Love becomes the business of our lives.

John Woolman, 1763

19.12 We may recognise the deeply troubled world we are facing as a crisis of the Spirit – one that will continue until humanity puts itself in right ordering with the great mystery at the heart of our being, and at the heart of the cosmos. Without such a right ordering, we will not be able to take the necessary steps to ensure human beings live lives which respect each other and the great diversity of life which our beautiful planet upholds.

Gerald Hewitson, 2023

19.13 For if you really become sensitised to the awesome wonder of the natural world and know yourself an intimate part of it, you also become sensitised to the cry of the hungry, the marginalised and oppressed, to the crying of the earth, the pain of our polluted and plundered planet.

Jo Farrow, 2013

19.14 I think I have wasted a great deal of my life waiting to be called to some great mission which would change the world. I have looked for important social movements. I have wanted to make a big and important contribution to the causes I believe in. I think I have been too ready to reject the genuine leadings I have been given as being matters of little consequence. It has taken me a long time to learn that obedience means doing what we are called to do even if it seems pointless or unimportant or even silly. The great social movements of our time may well be part of our calling. The ideals of peace and justice and equality which are part of our religious tradition are often the focus of debate. But we cannot simply immerse ourselves in these activities. We need to develop our own unique social witness, in obedience to God. We need to listen to the gentle whispers which will tell us how we can bring our lives into greater harmony with heaven.

Deborah Haines, 1978

For more on leadings, see 2: Quaker spiritual experience and 4: Quaker discernment.

Being faithful

19.15 Quaker witness invites people into new relationships of justice, peace and integrity. Often it is a call for change in a society or its laws. When we 'speak truth to power', we aim to communicate in a way that encourages others to hear and respond to our message. Nevertheless, once we have done all we can, we may have to accept that we cannot control how our witness is received. Our task is to be faithful to our leadings and leave the outcome to God. We are not called to be successful, and we may never know the full impact of our words or actions.

19.16 At present I am in the South Hebron Hills (occupied Palestinian territories) working as an Ecumenical Accompanier for three months. It is not easy to serve here as there is so much need. There are times that I despair and feel my service here is not useful or effective and then I remember that I am not here to be successful but faithful! At the beginning of my stay I heard a story which has sustained me in my service. What is the weight of a snowflake? A snowflake does not weigh anything! And yet the combined weight of many snowflakes on a branch can make that branch break off and fall to the ground! So I try to enjoy being a snowflake in this divided land.

Towards the source, 2014

19.17 I have become a good deal disillusioned over 'big' conferences and large gatherings. I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place.

Rufus Jones, 1937

19.18 Our actions do not witness to our own goodness but to the leadings of God, and they aim to speak to that of God in others. Our witness may be challenging, and it can create resistance, but it should not be a display of our own self-righteousness. Authentic witness gives others a chance to hear how God may be speaking to them in their own hearts.

19.19 When religion is real, it throws the centre of our interest and our action right outside ourselves. It is not about myself at all, or only incidentally and for a purpose that is not my own. It is about the world I live in and the part that I must play in it. It is not to serve my need but the need of the world through me. Real religion is not something that you possess but rather a power that lays hold of you and uses you in the service of a will that is greater than your own.

John Macmurray, 1945

19.20 At our best, we are unobstructed channels for something powerful that is coursing through us but that is from beyond us and does not belong to us... At its most essential core, 'the work' is to allow ourselves to be well used.

Eden Grace, 2019

19.21 We are not for names, nor men, nor titles of Government, nor are we for this party nor against the other... but we are for justice and mercy and truth and peace and true freedom, that these may be exalted in our nation, and that goodness, righteousness, meekness, temperance, peace, unity with God, and with one another, that these things may abound.

Edward Burrough, 1659

19.22 Jesus said 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone' [Mark 10:18, New Standard Revised Version]. I used to think this was false modesty on Jesus' part, but I have since learned that giving up on my own goodness liberates me to follow the Spirit. To focus on my own goodness is to try and do things in my own strength. I am not called to save the world, I am not called to be good. I'm called to be obedient to the promptings of love and truth in my heart.

Mark Russ, 2019

See also 20: Witness in daily life, 21: Witness with others and 22: Our peace testimony.

Chapter 20:

Witness in daily life

20.01 Our first task is to love one another, to be valiant for the truth upon the earth, and to remain attentive to the true spirit in all that we do. This task infuses all our lives. It is, indeed, not so much a specific thing to do as a manner in which to do all things. For that reason its importance is likely to be overlooked: we are tempted to rush on past this advice about every little action, about the details of everyday living, in order to get to those tasks that may save the world, or at least change it. But this temptation must be firmly turned aside. We do need to attend to the spirit and manner of all our actions. Openings for witness are never obvious: they have to be seen, and they cannot or will not be seen by those who do not practice seeing them in daily affairs.

Newton Garver, 1983

Introduction

20.02 Quaker witness starts in our own lives and relationships, with family and friends, and in our everyday conversations with strangers, neighbours and colleagues.

We may also be called to witness in our Quaker communities, to speak up for people who are excluded or to challenge prejudice or unfairness. No community will ever be perfect, but, unless we encourage each other to be more faithful, we have no foundation for speaking out to the rest of the world.

It is often through our lifestyles that we witness to our leadings. Choosing to live more faithfully may also encourage others to make more life-giving choices.

This chapter includes:

- Witness in our relationships
- Truthfulness and integrity
- Living simply
- Gambling and speculation

For more personal experiences of Friends, see D: Our Quaker life journeys. For witness within Quaker communities, see 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities.

Witness in our relationships

20.03 In the way we treat others and in all our relationships, we witness to the measure of divine guidance we have received. Often, it is in our closest relationships that we are most challenged.

It is also through these relationships that we can offer our witness for love and equality, and awaken others to a sense of their own worth.

20.04 When I taught my children how to do many things I ensured that they would have skills to give them abilities, enjoyment and health. What I think I chiefly taught them was that I was right and they were wrong. When I hear them teaching their friends how to play games I realise just how much I bossed them around. In seeking to pass on our values to our children I think we largely waste our time. They will pick up our values from us by the way we live and the assumptions that underpin our own lives.

John Guest, 1987

20.05 I am not saying that the oppressive effects of sexism are never felt within the Society of Friends, for we are all members of the wider society and affected by its attitudes. There are Friends who think that catering should be the preserve of women and that matters of finance are best understood by men. There have been times within Friends' circles when I have felt hurt by these attitudes, as I have no

doubt unwittingly wounded others. But I have found the Society's commitment to truth an encouragement and challenge to my own strivings for integrity, and I give thanks for that.

Pauline Leader, 1986

20.06 Friends' experiences of discrimination and witness for equality take many forms. Jill Green describes how her Quaker wedding empowered her witness in daily life:

How much joy we had that day. AND how unexpected the difference to us, both in our relationship, and in the confidence with which we now face the world when speaking truth to power. Also in referring to each other as 'wife' to everyone when booking B&Bs and other such entertainments in non-Quaker settings... I consider being open about it to be part of our Quaker witness to equality, and having received the support of our whole [area meeting] I feel empowered to use our title anywhere.

Jill Green, 2019

20.07 Throughout our history, many Friends have been led to witness to the humanity of people with criminal convictions and to work for a better criminal justice system:

Friends have a long history of involvement in the criminal justice system, some of it from the inside. And it is that inside view, that history of dissent, that gives a particular edge to Friends' work in this field. We are not only practical, we have a vision. We who believe in original blessing see that anti-social acts are an expression of the pain of fragmented lives: both the result and the cause of broken relationships in the family and in the community. We see how we need to travel from exclusion and preconception to right relationship with every human being. How we can accompany others in the journey from harm to healing.

Jennifer Kavanagh, 2007

20.08 Ruth McFarlane is a Quaker educator whose witness includes her relationships with students in prison:

> I have been working in and around prisons as a teacher for much of my life. In recent years, as I have developed a social enterprise with a business partner who has served a long prison sentence, I have come to understand this work as a commitment to equality through a shared love of learning.
>
> Through our facilitation of university courses, I regularly speak to people on the phone about their studies. I am one of the few adults they are happy to speak to (apart from family members), who uses their first name, and who is not making a judgement about their behaviour, perceived risk or suitability for release.
>
> As I continue to learn more about inequality in society, recognising my own privilege, I am discovering how I can use it to challenge injustice and offer a connection to people who choose to study in prison.
>
> This means approaching each person with love, using first names and non-stigmatising language, and challenging others, especially organisations, to be more accepting of difference and of risk. Things don't always go right in life, but none of us wants to be forever known and labelled for our failures.
>
> Ruth McFarlane, 2026

20.09 Solidarity with migrants and refugees is central to the witness of many Friends. Moya Barnett writes about living in a house of hospitality for refugee women and children in Calais:

> It was a difficult and deeply scarring experience; living in solidarity with and opening myself up to love for these women also meant experiencing great pain due to the hardships in their lives. All of the women and children I met had experienced police brutality and were continuing to experience it as they went out to attempt

to cross the Channel. Many had also been victims of exploitation, extortion and violence from the smugglers as well as from the state. One woman had lost a baby due to the conditions in the camps, immediately before she had come to our house. She announced this at the dinner table one day out of the blue and then moved on to doing the dishes.

Our role wasn't to save these women but to create a space where they could share these experiences. Through sharing, they were able to process some of the trauma and work past it. Often the most crucial time to be a compassionate listener was the early hours of the morning when people would troop back in, having survived a shipwreck or an attack by the police and all they wanted was to eat, tell about it and go to bed. The first time it was told was serious, by the time they woke up again, it was something that could be laughed about. Paul in Galatians 6:2 urges us to 'Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.' But it is not an easy duty.

Moya Barnett, 2025

20.10 Quaker values led Bayard Rustin to a life of activism on behalf of racial justice:

My activism did not spring from my being gay, or for that matter, from my being black. Rather, it is rooted, fundamentally, in my Quaker upbringing and the values that were instilled in me by my grandparents who reared me. Those values are based on the concept of a single human family and the belief that all members of that family are equal... The racial injustice that was present in this country [the United States] during my youth was a challenge to my belief in the oneness of the human family. It demanded my involvement in the struggle to achieve interracial democracy, but it is very likely that I would have been involved had I been a white person with the same philosophy.

Bayard Rustin, 1986

Truthfulness and integrity

20.11 One of the earliest Quaker insights was that we are called to speak truthfully at all times, without lying, evasion or flattery.

20.12 There is that in your hearts which tells you, that you should do unto all men, as ye would they should do unto you. This is just, this is righteous, this is equal. There is that in you which testifies against lying and false swearing, and bearing false witness against your neighbour.

Margaret Fell, 1710

20.13 From the beginning Friends have believed that they could have direct and immediate communication with God which would enable them to discern right ethical choices... Arising from the teaching of Jesus... 'Let your Yes mean Yes and your No mean No'... Quakers perceived that with a conscience illuminated by the Light, life became an integrated whole with honesty as its basis.

Quaker Peace and Service, 1992

20.14 Truthfulness is our witness against dishonesty and manipulation. It creates the foundation for relationships of trust and openness. Integrity includes being honest and truthful, recognising with grace and humility when we are wrong, taking responsibility for our actions, and being open to the truth that is revealed to others.

20.15 I once heard a shepherd on the radio talking about caring for her sheep in the mountains as the cold weather closed in. She said she would be bringing them down to 'kinder ground' in the valley, where they would be safe from the blizzards and exposure of the high fells. Kinder Ground is what we need to create and nurture to help our search for the truth. Away from the storms of argument and the entrenched positions that prevent reasoned discussion, we can seek truth together. We need to think of ways to make space for exploration, for the calm sharing of views and the exchange of

ideas. By doing so, we can find paths to reduce conflict and find common bonds as we work towards the acceptance that it is OK to change our minds.

Thomas Penny, 2021

20.16 The practice of Integrity is about both self-awareness and wholeness. It is born out of a community of practice committed to living integrated lives. Practices and language develop out of that commitment that gives tools for understanding the self, my relationship to God and other people, the natural world, and material objects. A practice of integrity provides a kind of self-reflective mirror upon which I am invited to look at myself and my community and reflect upon whether my 'Yes is Yes' and my 'No is No'.

Wess Daniels, 2017

20.17 The family is a place to practise being 'valiant for the truth'. We can live lives of integrity, letting both 'yes' and 'no' come out of the depth of truth within us, careful of the truth in all our dealings, so that our words and our lives speak the same message. We cannot expect our children to be honest with us or anyone else if they hear us stretching the truth for convenience or personal gain. They are quick to catch such discrepancies. Moreover, we should trust them enough to be honest with them about family problems – disasters, serious illness, impending death. It is far harder on children not to know what is wrong.

Elizabeth Watson, 1980

Living simply

20.18 Quakers are called to live simply. Inward simplicity includes reducing our needs and distractions, to find greater wholeness and clarity of purpose.

20.19 In a life devoted to God's purpose, the stripping down of the inessentials pares away the context of life: one is more purely an instrument of purpose. Reducing the clutter in our lives, whether in material objects, use of time or money, or in our religious practices, leads to an increased clarity of vision and a focus; a view of life and its priorities that is in itself simple. We can move towards a state in which our attitudes and life are all of one piece, integrated and made one. Simplicity, like a sacrament, is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

Jennifer Kavanagh, 2011

20.20 I wish I might emphasize how a life becomes simplified when dominated by faithfulness to a few concerns. Too many of us have too many irons in the fire. We get distracted by the intellectual claim to our interest in a thousand and one good things, and before we know it we are pulled and hauled breathlessly along by an over-burdened programme of good committees and good undertakings. I am persuaded that this fevered life of church workers is not wholesome. Undertakings get plastered on from the outside because we can't turn down a friend. Acceptance of service on a weighty committee should really depend upon an answering imperative within us, not merely upon a rational calculation of the factors involved. The concern-orientated life is ordered and organized from within. And we learn to say No as well as Yes by attending to the guidance of inner responsibility. Quaker simplicity needs to be expressed not merely in dress and architecture and height of tombstones but also in the structure of a relatively simplified and coordinated life-programme of social responsibilities.

Thomas R Kelly, 1941

20.21 A simpler material lifestyle may help us to cultivate our inner life. A leading to simplify our possessions can also be a powerful challenge to an economic order based on consumption and waste.

20.22 I felt that I should only take from life what I needed to sustain myself and to give back whatever I could. I also felt that by living from my love outwards, which meant giving all I could in my work, I would always have enough to get by.

Anonymous, Quaker Quest, 2006

20.23 In so far as we are led towards true simplicity we will increasingly be called to dissent from a central thrust of the world we live in... The market economy functions by fuelling our wants; it manufactures new desires, passing them off as needs. Ceaselessly, advertising implores us to consume. It is therefore our conviction that developing resistance to consumerism is an essential spiritual practice today.

Jonathan Dale and others, 2000

20.24 May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions.

John Woolman, 1793

20.25 I want to list ten controlling principles for the outward expression of simplicity. They should not be viewed as laws but as one attempt to flesh out the meaning of simplicity into twentieth-century life. First, buy things for their usefulness rather than their status. Second, reject anything that is producing an addiction in you. Third, develop a habit of giving things away. De-accumulate. Fourth, refuse to be propagandised by the custodians of modern gadgetry. Fifth, learn to enjoy things without owning them. Sixth, develop a deeper appreciation for the creation. Seventh, look with a healthy scepticism at all 'buy now, pay later' schemes. Eighth, obey Jesus' injunction about plain, honest speech. Ninth, reject anything that will breed the oppression of others. Tenth, shun whatever would distract you from your main goal.

Richard J Foster, 1979

20.26 Many Friends are called to a simpler lifestyle as an expression of their love for the earth and a witness against environmental destruction.

20.27 The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious Creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.

John Woolman, 1772

20.28 Our good life will flow out of our love of life, our compassion, our joy, and then it will also touch others. If we love the Earth, we reduce our consumption and our waste because it is a truly joyful thing to do, not just a grim, guilty necessity. A good life cannot be for ourselves alone, but flows out of a love that embraces the whole of life on Earth – past, present and imagined future.

Pam Lunn, 2011

20.29 Challenging market economics with a Biblical sense of the goodness of God in creation is to join a spiritual struggle. Faith in God, solidarity with the suffering poor and all other forms of life demands that we take a stand and say, 'This destruction must stop.' We must be perfectly clear about the implications of undertaking this responsibility. It is more than just setting up household recycling bins, growing organic vegetables or riding a bike to work. It is more than a talking job. It is a renovation which will change everything: the way we do business, the way we eat, the way we travel, the houses we build, the products and services we can expect and the prices we pay for them, the way we feel about trees and the way we worship God.

Keith Helmuth, 1990

Gambling and speculation

20.30 Refusing to participate in gambling and speculation is one way that Friends witness against the appeal of unearned wealth and the temptation to profit from the loss of others.

20.31 Consider which of the ways to happiness offered by society are truly fulfilling and which are potentially corrupting and destructive. Be discriminating when choosing means of entertainment and information. Resist the desire to acquire possessions or income through unethical investment, speculation or games of chance.

Ystyriwch pa ffyrdd i hapusrwydd a gynigir gan gymdeithas sy'n rhoi gwir fodlonrwydd a pha rai sy'n dwyn hadau llygredd a dinistr. Byddwch yn ofalus wrth ddewis cyfryngau difyrrwch a gwybodaeth. Gwrthwynebwch yr awydd i ennill meddiannau neu incwm trwy fuddsoddi'n anfoesol, neu trwy fentro arian yn anfoesol, neu trwy hap-chwarae.

Advices & queries / *Cynghorion a holiadau* 39, 1994

20.32 In our 'Advices' we are warned against commercial speculations of a gambling character, and we are told to 'remember how widespread and diverse are the temptations to grow rich at the expense of others'. The faithful observance of this advice points the way to an issue greater than personal rectitude with regard to gambling. It should lead to an examination of the system which permits or encourages these abuses, and to a demand for drastic changes.

Shipley N Brayshaw, 1933

Chapter 21:

Witness with others

21.01 For me, the crucial and underlying question for us as Quakers is: are we content to be merely a support group for people on their individual spiritual journeys, or are we able to rediscover solidarity as a people of God?

Pam Lunn, 2011

Introduction

21.02 Witness is not just an individual act. We discern the leadings of the Spirit in community, and we may be led to act together to express our shared Quaker testimony.

As a community of faith, we can do more together than we can alone. By joining with Friends and others, we may have a clearer and more creative voice. This is also an opportunity to find common ground and shared insights with other groups and faith traditions.

In a world in crisis, Quakers are often led to forms of witness that challenge oppressive authorities and power structures. This can be costly and may lead to social exclusion, loss of income or even legal punishment. Friends have a long tradition of openly resisting unjust laws and accepting fines and imprisonment. We can also find resilience and hope in shared faithfulness to the Spirit's leadings.

This chapter includes:

- Witnessing together
- Facing the crises of our time
- Speaking truth to power

- Resilience and hope

Witnessing together

21.03 Our collective Quaker witness includes working for economic, political and cultural change in our society. This often means building broader movements for peace, equality and climate justice by working with other groups.

21.04 Joining together with others increases the impact of our witness. We may act in all kinds of ways to promote peace and social justice in our everyday lives but together we can do so much more... We are not alone on our spiritual journey, neither are we alone in the witness that comes through the spiritual life fully lived. We can hope that our sense of community can ultimately spread across all of humanity... We must now apply ourselves and create conscientious action and positive change.

Junior Yearly Meeting, 2022

21.05 Quakers are by no means alone in seeking to build a fairer society. We work with others, valuing community and unity of purpose. Through our experience, we already know that change happens and lasts when people come together and stay together in co-ordinated movements that insist on change. We join those movements, which we see as doing God's work. We look for that of God in organisations as well as individuals; a movement is people.

Elizabeth Allen, 2017

Facing the crises of our time

21.06 The spirituality of early Friends was formed in a time of violent social upheaval. They bore witness that the 'Seed' of God in the heart can overcome all the powers of the world:

Keep your first love, and let not the threats of men, neither the

frowns of the world affright you from that which you have prized more than all the world. Now the sun is up, and a time of scorching is come, and that which hath no root will wither. Now every ground will be tried, and blessed is the good that brings forth the Seed which must inherit the promise...

The way of God was ever hated by the world and the powers thereof. Never heed the rough spirits nor the heavy, for their bound is set, and their limit known; but mind the Seed, which hath dominion over all.

Francis Howgill, 1664

21.07 Our world today is facing many connected crises. Climate breakdown, conflict and displacement, democratic erosion, rising inequality, and rapid technological change call for Friends to be prophets as well as reconcilers:

Our dependence on fossil fuels drives dangerous climate change. Wealth, in the hands of a powerful few, fuels conflict and inequality. The interests of those who seek control of diminishing resources are protected by ever-more costly military and other technology as a mistaken means to building security...

The UK's political system is stretched and its processes have been found wanting and in need of change. Civil discourse is fed by, and is feeding, deepening levels of division and mistrust in public life, with legitimate dissent now threatened by restrictions on public protest.

Across the country people are living and suffering from the consequences of inequality and an economic system that is not working. Immigrants and refugees struggle with the stress of not knowing, or needing to prove, their right to be here, even when fleeing war...

What does love require of us? To help build new ways forward, laying foundations for cooperation and peace. To be willing and ready to join in common cause, act in solidarity, challenge injustice,

empower those whose voices are silenced. To be both prophets and reconcilers, taking a stand when necessary, but always ready to listen. To support each other in taking action with and for vulnerable people and those daunted by the magnitude of the task. To promote and support nonviolence and policies aimed at tackling roots of conflict in society and globally. To find ways of engaging with those who disagree – nurture, learn, practice and build the skills needed for this challenging task.

Northern Friends Peace Board, 2023

Climate and ecological crisis

21.08 At our Yearly Meeting in Canterbury in 2011, Quakers in Britain discerned the Canterbury Commitment. This developed our longstanding spiritual concern for the earth into a collective, faith-based commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community. The Canterbury Commitment connects our witness for sustainability to broader issues of global justice:

> The Canterbury Commitment recognised that the environmental crisis is enmeshed with global economic injustice and that tackling inequality is central to taking action on the climate emergency. It made clear that this is a spiritual task.

Website of Quakers in Britain, accessed 2026

21.09 Quaker witness for climate justice includes work on reducing the carbon footprint of our buildings and communities, divesting from fossil fuels, lobbying Parliament, and supporting international climate negotiations and nonviolent direct action to call attention to the climate emergency.

21.10 From personal witness, let us build collective action. Those privileged by our current economic and political systems will not give up their positions without a struggle. To the extent that we hold privilege in these systems, we must also be ready to sacrifice

this. We believe that our current political systems do not serve us effectively in this work [for climate justice]. We pray that we will remain undaunted by obfuscation, delay and distraction in response to our work. Seeking to reduce carbon emissions is an urgent priority, but without interrogating and disrupting our existing economic systems, this will only lead us back to an unjust system, and may encourage corporations, governments and individuals to delay necessary action and avoid systemic change. While living faithfully, taking practical action to reduce our personal impact on the planet allows us to work in this area with integrity, it cannot be where our faith-led action ends... Quakers in Britain must join with Friends and others across the world learning and acting together.

Minute 33, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2022

21.11 Climate justice has become central to our peace work and concerns as we believe that climate breakdown will fan the flames of war and injustice. A vision of climate justice is not just about tweaking our energy systems, committing to slightly more efficient cars on our roads, or becoming vegan.

It's about recognising that our climate crisis is rooted in inequality: for hundreds of years our global economy has been a place where a few have been winning while others have been losing out. Those who have lost out are now, as we speak, being hit by climate breakdown.

We've realised that, to confront this injustice, we need to be active. We need to voice our views, loud and clear, be active and engage politically. We all must confront the injustice and hold our leaders to account.

We must build the world as we want to see it. God is within every one of us and therefore we must act like it...

Faith groups have much to offer the movement for climate justice. We can speak out with moral clarity, reach across difference, speak with both love and conviction. But the climate movement has much to offer our faith too. It's an opportunity to come together, with

purpose, helping others to see our vision for a just world.

Anya Nanning Ramamurthy, 2019

21.12 Many Friends are being led to challenge institutions that contribute to the climate crisis. Phil Laurie is a climate activist who has faced legal penalties for nonviolent direct action at fossil fuel company sites:

> It has been 18 months since I decided to oppose the UK Government's inaction on climate collapse. I felt I needed to stand with those who have said 'enough is enough'! I felt that not standing with those speaking out would be to be complicit in a tragedy. A tragedy so great and so avoidable it would constitute a crime. We are all complicit in certain ways and we can all try to stand in solidarity in different ways.
>
> Some of us have the privilege to do certain actions; others are not able. I am white and consider myself to be in the liberal, middle class. I have no future that can be impacted by my actions and so I have an especially privileged position. So, I act. I act to try and draw attention to our imminent peril, and to highlight actions we can take which can begin to solve the problem.
>
> Friends, ask yourselves and your neighbours: what is your role? What will you do? How will you show up in solidarity in this climate emergency? How will we ensure that peace is the outcome?

Phil Laurie, 2023

Polarisation and extremism

21.13 Society has become increasingly divided, with opposing groups holding very different views of the world and even of basic facts. This is deepening mistrust and making it harder to find common ground. Quakers are often called to listen across these divides, to help build shared understanding:

Sometime in the last twenty years, and even more so in the last ten, I started hearing a common message: 'If somebody disagrees with you, cut them off.' There seems to be a movement toward non-communication as a virtue... It's become a point of pride, even, to preemptively end relationships before they start. 'If you believe such-and-such, don't even talk to me.'

And this is where extremism comes in. It is simply a sociological truth of humanity that, when surrounded by people who agree with us, we will inevitably become more extreme in our views... We may or may not notice that we're changing the definition of what positions are socially acceptable within our group. We may or may not be conscious of our own extremism. This is how individualism leads to extremism. The more people we cut off because we disagree with them, the more we are surrounded by people who agree with us, and the more our perspectives become more extreme...

Consider John Woolman, one of our most ardent anti-slavery activists. How did he approach abolitionism? He drew a line for himself in that he would not benefit from the enslavement of his fellow humans, and he changed his manner of dress and other habits accordingly. But he did not sever relationship with those who enslaved others. Instead, he broke bread with them and spoke with love and tenderness because he was concerned for their souls' welfare.

Emily Provance, 2023

21.14 We all have a responsibility to avoid spreading misinformation, and to uphold standards of truthfulness in public speech:

Quakers are also known as 'seekers of truth'. How do we maintain that fundamental commitment to truth in an age of widespread online misinformation and disinformation?... We become the problem when we amplify misinformation or disinformation by sharing it to influence others or in case others are interested. So if we see something controversial, scandalous or sensational... we

should take the responsibility of fact-checking it and verifying the credentials and motives of the source before sharing it with anyone who might be taken in.

William Heath, 2020

Erosion of democracy

21.15 As democratic and legal norms have been eroded in many societies, we can no longer assume that international law and human rights will be respected by those in power. This creates new challenges for Quaker peacemakers:

> The system of international order, supported by the United Nations, with rules on how nations behaved to each other… is breaking down. Armed invasion of peaceful neighbours; the use of famine and ethnic cleansing as weapons of war; imprisonments without trial and other breaches of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; cyber attacks on a country's industries, services and governments; and other aggressions – all these are signs that the former worldwide consensus is losing its grip. The authority of the institutions designed to enforce it, like the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, is disrespected. We seem to be in a game where the players are ignoring the rules and making up their own, and the referee is powerless to intervene.
>
> This has important implications for peacemakers… Classic mediation assumes that the parties to a conflict want it to be resolved, even though it may be hard for them to accept the compromises they might need to make. The repeated series of failed negotiations in today's major conflicts suggests that on one side at least there is no wish for peace; leaders may actually want and need the conflict to continue – sometimes because they would lose their grip on power if it were resolved. So peacemakers may have to reconsider some of their assumptions. Is there any

chance of restoring the rule of law in the foreseeable future, or do they need to develop new tools for a new context?

John Lampen, 2025

21.16 Friends are also being led to work with wider movements to defend the right to peaceful protest and the independence of juries:

A few short years ago I was 'occupying' a road outside the Houses of Parliament, part of a big gathering of climate protesters, and found myself both relishing and distressed by the irony of chanting together: 'Show me what democracy looks like, this is what democracy looks like.' Fast forward to the present in which draconian anti-protest laws are in place in the UK despite widespread criticism nationally and internationally. I have a strong sense that living in these wild times requires me to find my way to quiet, ordinary but, I hope, significant acts of defiance: nonviolent direct action. In the words of Wendell Berry, 'to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing'.

Jenni Crisp, 2026

Authoritarianism and xenophobia

21.17 The weakening of democratic safeguards has contributed to growing state recklessness and abuse of power, especially against migrants and other marginalised people. Quakers oppose all systems and politics based on scapegoating, exclusion and abusive power.

21.18 The world has entered a new and deeply troubling phase in its history. Standards of truthfulness and integrity in public and commercial life are being undermined to the extent that democracy itself is under threat...

We see signs of authoritarianism emerging, where truth is deliberately distorted, where politicians claim 'alternative facts', where those in power expect to act with impunity, where respect for the judiciary is undermined; indeed, the very basis of democracy is being destroyed...

All this is set against the backdrop of the climate emergency… and a deeply destructive resistance to the acceptance of scientific findings. This matters, because such resistance, just like that to verifiable facts, is corroding the vital trust we need for a functioning democratic society.

Quaker Truth and Integrity Group, 2022

21.19 Through Quakers' longstanding work welcoming newcomers to our shores, we have seen up close that the government's creation of a 'hostile environment' is increasingly embedding policies of discrimination into the practices of the British state. Quakers in Britain are committed to working with others to change this, creating a culture of compassion and welcoming hospitality that answers that of God in every person…

The current system of discrimination against those seeking sanctuary is, for many of those who encounter it, a wall of injustice. And that wall is, in part, a product of racism and war, which have cultivated a system of inequality and injustice in British culture.

That is why, with others, we seek to build a culture of welcome, challenge racism in all its forms and seek to change the law. Every act of welcome is an act of faith and an act of peace. As Quakers, we sustain ourselves with the knowledge that all walls fall eventually.

Meeting for Sufferings, 2017

Technological disruption

21.20 New technologies are leading to profound changes in work and society. Artificial intelligence (AI) brings new opportunities and threats. We are challenged to examine our own use of these technologies and to work for effective democratic control of their applications.

21.21 The downsides of 'big data' are becoming more apparent: invasion of privacy, absorption of our time, distancing from human contact,

loss of control, abdication of our ethical responsibilities, increasing dependence on large US companies, environmental impact...

Behind the promises of how 'big data' is transforming our lives for the better, there is growing evidence of its damage to nature: water usage by data centres, their land and energy requirements, their global warming impact.

Andrew Hughes Nind, 2025

21.22 AI resembles humans but is not human; it develops over time but is not animate; it simulates consciousness but is not sentient. We should harness AI where it is appropriate to improve our lives and the world, but not think that it has 'that of God' in it. AI is a product of human creation, a tool for our use that aggregates information to exceed human cognition – but it is not alive; it is not sacred like living things.

Kenneth Cukier, 2026

21.23 If the world is offering you a frictionless life where AI writes your emails, summarises your meetings and even simulates your friends, then the Quaker act of rebellion is to choose friction. It means saying, well, I could have this bot write this condolence note in three seconds, but I'm going to choose the friction of writing it myself, because the struggle to find the words is where the love is, and likewise, the friction between us is where the real truth lies...

So, for me personally, I think I'll keep using my AI tool, but only as a first step. If it ever replaces human connection or my own inner work of discernment, then I need to be OK with deleting it. I am choosing to stay informed on the actual environmental impact of my technological choices both in terms of AI and all the other ways I move through the world. I want to be deeply intentional here, and I am actively choosing not to build a frictionless life.

Zack Jackson, 2026

21.24 We need to do more than just hope that AI can gain an ethical consciousness. We need humans inside the AI loop, ethical guidelines that are strongly enforced, and enough transparency that people know what is going on and are able to make choices accordingly.

So, we need to focus on providing this transparency, letting people know when AI is being used, and on the accountability of developers and deployers. We need protection against exploitative working practices. New regulation should protect the rights and interests of people and thereby shape the actions and choices of corporations. We should be building machines that work for the common good, not adapting society to the wishes of those few elites currently driving the AI agenda. Those most impacted by AI systems, which includes the most vulnerable in society, should have their opinions taken into account…

But let's not forget that technology can be used for good or for ill. Phone tapping exists, but that doesn't mean we want to give up our phones. The same could apply for AI. There is a huge potential for new AI tools that could be truly good for humanity, especially in the medical field. How might Joseph Rowntree, for example, have used AI?

Siani Morris, 2023

Speaking truth to power

21.25 Quakers are often led to challenge authorities and structures that underpin oppression and injustice. When we speak truth to power, we reach out to those whose actions we are challenging, inviting them to respond to the Spirit's leadings. This is why we reject any methods that treat people as enemies and entrench opposition:

I am wary of 'righteous' anger and find myself with a particular concern for answering that of God in the perpetrators. Much of the violence is symptomatic of old, deep wounds, and of a system in

which we are all complicit – even if we try to distance ourselves by fossil fuel divestment or avoiding products from illegal Israeli settlements.

Laurie Michaelis, 2017

21.26 We can learn from the experience of early Friends, who resisted political systems that were trying to eradicate the Quaker community. They described their nonviolent struggle against persecution and oppression as the Lamb's War.

21.27 Basic to the early Quaker world view, then, was the conviction that we are participants in a trial of strength. The goodness, love and long-suffering of the Creator are locked in conflict with the powers of disorder, hatred, and self-esteem...

In his book called *The Lamb's War*, James Nayler describes the only weapons in this war as love, gentleness, faith, patience, purity, grace, virtue, temperance, self-denial, meekness, and innocency. He warns that we will be ranged against those who use whips, prisons, tortures and torments, and he experienced each of those things in his own life. We need a spiritual discipline of considerable resilience and endurance if we are in earnest about the task in which we have engaged. Such a thing does not come naturally...

The forces of religious fundamentalism, economic imperialism, crypto-fascism, and racism are not noted for their devotion to human freedoms. The evils which beset England in the seventeenth century are not so very different from the evils that still stalk the world. If the malady remains the same, might there not still be something to be said for the cure?

John Punshon, 1990

21.28 The Lamb's quarrel is not against the creation, for then should his weapons be carnal, as the weapons of the worldly spirits are: 'For we war not with flesh and blood,' nor against the creation of

God; that we love; but we fight against the spiritual powers of wickedness, which wars against God in the creation.

James Nayler, 1657

21.29 Some early Friends were fierce in their condemnation of oppression, but they still called their persecutors to a change of heart, grounded in their faith that the Spirit speaks within all people:

Fear the living God, and repent while you have time, and hearken to that in your conscience, which cries for equity: Is there not something within you that cries for it? Oh! Listen to it, that the bonds of iniquity may be broken, that equity (which is oppressed in you) may go free to serve the Lord... Howl ye rich men, for the misery which is coming upon you, for the rust of your silver and gold shall eat you through as a canker, and shall rise up in judgement against you... Woe to all you corrupt Magistrates, who are persecuting the innocent and the just.

Margaret Killam, 1655

21.30 Friends today are still led to witness against institutions of violence. Helen Steven describes an act of Quaker witness outside a nuclear submarine base:

On the roundabout opposite the entrance a small band of ten or twelve folks is sitting quietly in a circle holding [a] Quaker meeting for worship... the traffic thunders ceaselessly around the little group but the circle seems to contain a deep well of profound stillness. Across the road a policeman hefts his machine gun nervously and shifts from foot to foot as if slightly embarrassed. Several passing cars sound their horns in support, one or two drivers roll down their windows and shout abuse. Still the silence remains and the peace banners flap lazily in the wind. After an hour, hands are shaken, camp chairs folded up, farewell wave to the police, and the group quietly disperses.

> Another small act of witness is over. So what was going on? Prayer undoubtedly. Earnest sincere prayer so deep as to be almost tangible. And witness too. This was prayer over and against a background of unimaginable violence. Prayer as protest, speaking truth to power in its own way, deliberately placing itself in the full public gaze in opposition to military might.
>
> Helen Steven, 2005

21.31 Sometimes our own experience of discrimination can empower our Quaker witness:

> When the groomed delegates arrived for the Annual Defence Dinner at the Imperial War Museum, they had a shocking reminder of the death they were celebrating as they had to walk over the bodies of peace activists. David hobbled up with his stick after them, posing as a guest, which prompted security to berate the activists about their heartlessness for stopping this poor old man – until David stunned them into silence by lying down in the entrance...
>
> A couple of weeks after the action, I ran into David volunteering in the Quaker Centre in Friends House... and I asked where he got that level of comfort with potentially arrestable nonviolent direct action.
>
> David looked into my eyes and smiled, but somehow sadly. 'Well, it's because I'm gay.' He told me that the police had repeatedly done their worst to him decades ago. They would entrap gay men, and beat them, severely, repeatedly. Now, he gently explained, they held no fear for him. David said he had turned his pain, which I could see was still in his eyes, into something useful. I have never really known what to do with that. I am filled with admiration for turning something so dark into something so powerful.
>
> Sam Walton, 2019

For guidance on nonviolent direct action, see the Resources.

Resilience and hope

21.32 Quaker witness can carry significant risks. We may be led to take actions that bring hardship or persecution. Many early Friends suffered imprisonment and even death for holding firm to Quaker testimony. In modern times, some Friends have also been led to a costly witness.

21.33 For this I can say, I... joyfully entered prisons as palaces, telling mine enemies to hold me there as long as they could: and in the prisonhouse I sung praises to my God, and esteemed the bolts and locks put upon me as jewels, and in the Name of the eternal God I always got the victory, for they could keep me there no longer than the determined time of my God.

If any one has received any good or benefit through this vessel, called William Dewsbury, give God the glory; I'll have none, I'll have none, I'll have none.

William Dewsbury, 1688

21.34 Police have raided places where I live three times. Angry magistrates have condemned me and sworn to make an example of my behavior so others will not follow. People lodged in the system of violent privilege only react this way when there is an effect. When there is fear of an ongoing effect in which more people are involved.

The parable of the talents [Matthew 25:14–30] shows us that we need to put a foot forward in order for the Light to show us where to go next. The climate crisis is overwhelming. Friends have descended from a spiritual lineage that thrives in the overwhelming and stagnates in the comfortable... For far too long, we have not taken steps on this journey: concerning ourselves more with the ways of the world than with the calling of the Light. The world is a scary, distracting place.

Worries about respectability and money can keep us passive. Professional lobbyists tell us to keep calm and keep paying our bills. But then there's the Light. The Light that made Quaker founder George Fox walk away from his home life and into the fields, against all common sense. That made many more ancestors walk knowingly into danger, imprisonment and death to keep the Quaker witness in the public eye and the truth available to all. Without those Friends risking their talents, we would have no Society and no teachings to learn from. If people from our spiritual ancestry had considered the best practical use of their time, they would have stayed home. They would have buried their talents.

If we rest in our comfortable lives, there will be no descendants to pass our spiritual gifts on to. We only need to move. Sitting this one out is to bury our talents.

Greg Rolles, 2025

21.35 No one ever said it would be easy, no one promised it wouldn't hurt. This way of life, this trusting one another and trusting God, is no impermeable shield, guaranteed to protect us by cutting us off, building barriers, keeping the bad things and the bad people out... We know the choice – we've known it all along – and we make it every day... 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live' [Deuteronomy 30:19].

Mary Lou Leavitt, 1987

21.36 Some Friends have resisted brutal authoritarian regimes in modern times. Leonhard Friedrich was a German Quaker who was arrested for his witness and survived Buchenwald concentration camp:

I will say nothing about the interrogation procedures, or the suffering I was subjected to. What I had to endure reduced me to an

extremely low physical and spiritual condition. The endless stress of repeated interrogations affected me badly...

The SS officer to whom I reported asked why I was in Buchenwald. I said the charge against me was that I was a Quaker. He became thoughtful and said that his mother, who was now dead, had told him his life had been saved by the Quaker school feeding programme after the First World War. In view of this he would help me, by taking me on his personal staff, if I would sign a statement of allegiance to the national Socialist state. He was surprised I did not seem keen, but ordered me to think about it and to report to him the next day. I spent another sleepless, anxious night worrying about what would happen. The next day he offered [me] a job in the munitions factory, where I would also earn some money and be moved out of the 'punishment block'. This was quite [a] dilemma for a Quaker! I replied that I could not make bombs to drop on London, because my daughter was living there.

Leonhard Friedrich, 1994

21.37 In Quaker communities, we can support each other in our faith and witness, and nurture resilience and hope.

21.38 We are not entirely at the mercy of the systems of darkness that dominate the world as it currently is. This is not the end of the story. Our hope is that the vision of the peaceable kingdom can be realised in our lives and in the world. Creation is good; God loves and cares for it. We are one part of the creation, along with other animals and the rest of the natural world. All things are interconnected and interdependent and need to be in right relationship. We can play our part in the process of reconciliation that leads to Gospel Order...

The vision of the peaceable kingdom is an ecological vision... a state of harmony based on complex interdependence and right relationship. If all things are interconnected, then all actions based on compassion, healing and justice, however small, will have a positive

impact. In the peaceable kingdom we take our place within this web of life; not above it, or in control of it, but as an essential part of it.

Stuart Masters, 2017

21.39 God has pledged divine blessings upon humanity and the restoration of wholeness in the world. No amount of human faithlessness can thwart God's will in the long run. Although terrible damage is done over the short term and futility often seems to rule, love will find a way.

Nevertheless, God's will must sooner or later find its answer in human will. For the world to change, people must change... A human pledge, binding the will to God's cause, must be made and kept. Here, a sense of blessing and curse is also inevitable. Whatever human freedom we retain to live by the covenant or abandon it, we must be aware of the benefits and blights inherent in our choice – not only for ourselves, but for our wider society and the earth as well. Our actions will be either life-sustaining or death-dealing.

Douglas Gwyn, 2006

21.40 At times of political turmoil and humanitarian crisis it is all the more important to hold fast to the core values that define us as human beings and as part of something far beyond us. We need to remember that alongside the horrors there exists a parallel reality: of compassion, love, daily acts of kindness and selflessness, expressions of what we know in our hearts to be true: our essential interconnectedness. Most of the ills of the world stem from our departure from this reality.

Jennifer Kavanagh, 2021

21.41 Our faith is strong, and we are a group of strong personalities, strong convictions, and strong love. We go from this place, resolving in our hearts to each do our one thing to shape the world to be better. Friends, let nothing stop you. Faith the size of a mustard seed

will move a mountain, but first it'll move one foot one step towards a spade. If you can't manage a mountain, go for a spade, if you can't manage a spade go for a step. If you find yourself further away, point yourself back at a spade.

Clerks' Offering, Young Friends General Meeting, 2024

21.42 In a message to a group of Quaker climate activists, Lindsey Fielder Cook, from the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva, wrote:

> Quakers have so much to give spiritually to this broken world as it awakens to existential crises.
>
> Be there with those who struggle with despair, be there with those who seek to build resilience, transformation, and a healthier and more just way to live together. Tell the story both of urgency and also of the healthy transformations and vision we all need. Uphold each other: fellow Friends may do more on climate justice than we realize.

Lindsey Fielder Cook, 2025

21.43 George Fox wrote to Friends during a time of severe persecution:

> Sing and rejoice, ye children of the day and of the light; for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt: and truth doth flourish as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns, and the plants atop of the hills, and upon them the lambs doth skip and play. And never heed the tempests nor the storms, floods nor rains, for the seed Christ is over all and doth reign. And so, be of good faith and valiant for the truth: for the truth can live in the jails.

George Fox, 1663

For more on testimony and following leadings, see 4: Quaker discernment and 5: Quaker testimony. For more on Quaker witness to peace, see 22: Our peace testimony. For more experiences of early Friends, see 29: Quaker history.

Chapter 22:

Our peace testimony

22.01 All bloody principles and practices we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world. That spirit of Christ by which we are guided is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil, and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ which leads us into all Truth will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.

A declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers, presented to Charles II in 1660 by Margaret Fell

Introduction

22.02 Quakers' rejection of violence and commitment to active peacemaking is known as our peace testimony. The peace testimony is one aspect of our whole response to the Inward Light as a community of faith, which is our Quaker testimony.

The actions Friends are led to take as their witness for peace express our collective testimony that violence and war are incompatible with living in the Light.

Peacemaking has never been easy, and in times of conflict Friends have been led to different courses of action in response to the Light in their own consciences. This has sometimes led to imprisonment for conscientious objection and other forms of war resistance.

Quakers do not simply resist war. We are also called to identify the

causes of violence and to create the conditions for peace and justice between peoples and nations.

This chapter includes:

- The roots of the Quaker peace testimony
- Pacifism
- Conscientious objection
- Disarmament
- Building peace

The roots of the Quaker peace testimony

22.03 Our peace testimony isn't a document, or a statement, or a creed, or an ideology… Our peace testimony is the cumulative body of action and reflection flowing out of Friends' experience of the Divine, as we've sought to interpret it in different situations.

Tim Gee, 2023

22.04 Friends have been led to develop a collective testimony for peace by our experience of the Inward Light, which we recognise as a seed of love and truth planted within all people.

22.05 When George Fox was offered a commission as an army officer, he replied that living in the 'life and power' of the Light made it impossible for him to participate in war:

> I told them I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars… I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strife were.

George Fox, 1651

22.06 This 'covenant of peace' is available to everyone, and is still experienced by Friends today:

> The love of God overflows and spills out from the peace testimony into every aspect of life... I know that God has planted this truth, this love, somewhere within us all. When I make contact with it, I know I must nourish it and respond to its leadings. I have learned that I have a choice: I can add to conflict, or I can try to reduce it... It was through the peace testimony that I first experienced God for myself, which is why I believe that trying to be true to it is an imperative of our faith.
>
> Caroline Westgate, 2001

22.07 Poet Waldo Williams wrote on the same theme in the twentieth century:

Y Tangnefeddwyr

Uwch yr eira, wybren ros,
Lle mae Abertawe'n fflam.
Cerddaf adre yn y nos,
Af gan gofio 'nhad a 'mam.
Gwyn eu byd tu hwnt i glyw,
Tangnefeddwyr, plant i Dduw.

Ni châi enllib, ni châi llaid
Roddi troed o fewn i'w tre.
Chwiliai 'mam am air o blaid
Pechaduriaid mwya'r lle.
Gwyn eu byd tu hwnt i glyw,
Tangnefeddwyr, plant i Dduw.

Angel y cartrefi tlawd
Roes i 'nhad y ddeuberl drud:
Cennad dyn yw bod yn frawd,
Golud Duw yw'r anwel fyd.
Gwyn eu byd tu hwnt i glyw,
Tangnefeddwyr, plant i Dduw.

Cenedl dda a chenedl ddrwg –
Dysgent hwy mai rhith yw hyn,

Ond goleuni Crist a ddwg
Ryddid i bob dyn a'i myn.
Gwyn eu byd, daw dydd a'u clyw,
Dangnefeddwyr, plant i Dduw.

Pa beth heno, eu hystâd,
Heno pan fo'r byd yn fflam?
Mae Gwirionedd gyda 'nhad
Mae Maddeuant gyda 'mam.
Gwyn ei byd yr oes a'u clyw,
Dangnefeddwyr, plant i Dduw.

The Peacemakers

Rose-red sky above the snow
Where bombed Swansea is alight,
Full of my father and mother I go,
I walk home in the night.
They are blest beyond hearing,
Peacemakers, children of God.

Neither, within their home, abuse
Nor slander could be found.
Mam would look for an excuse
For the biggest scoundrels round.
They are blest beyond hearing,
Peacemakers, children of God.

It was the angel of poor homes
Gave my father two rich pearls:
Brotherhood the mission of man,
God's largesse the invisible world.
They are blest beyond hearing,
Peacemakers, children of God.

Nation good or nation bad
(So they taught) is fantasy.
In Christ's light is freedom had
For any man that would be free.

Blest, the day dawns that will hear them,
Peacemakers, children of God.

What is their estate tonight,
Tonight, with the world ablaze?
Truth is with my father yet,
Mother with forgiveness stays.
The age will be blest that hears them,
Peacemakers, children of God.

Waldo Williams (translated by Tony Conran), 1941

22.08 Throughout our history, Friends have also recognised that refusing to use violence is central to the teachings and example of Christ, as the following reflections show.

22.09 Whoever can reconcile this, 'Resist not evil', with 'resist violence by force'; again, 'Give also thy other cheek', with 'strike again'; also 'Love thine enemies', with 'spoil them, make a prey of them, pursue them with fire and sword…' whoever, I say, can find a means to reconcile these things, may be supposed to also have found a way to reconcile God with the devil, Christ with Antichrist, light with darkness, and good with evil.

Robert Barclay, 1678

22.10 What would Christ do in my place?… Look! Christ in khaki, out in France thrusting his bayonet into the body of a German workman. See! The Son of God with a machine-gun, ambushing a column of German infantry, catching them unawares in a lane and mowing them down in their helplessness. Hark! The Man of Sorrows in a cavalry charge, cutting, hacking, thrusting, crushing, cheering. No! No! That picture is an impossible one, *and we all know it*.

That settles the matter for me. I cannot uphold the war, even on its supposedly defensive side, and I cannot, therefore, advise anyone else to enlist or to take part in what I believe to be wrong and wicked for myself.

Alfred Salter, 1914

For more on the nature of Quaker testimony, see 5: Quaker testimony.

Pacifism

22.11 The Peace Testimony has been a source of inspiration to Friends through the centuries, for it points to a way of life which embraces all human relationships... However, in our personal lives we have continually to wrestle with the difficulty of finding ways to reconcile our faith with practical ways of living it out in the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that we have not always all reached the same conclusions when dealing with the daunting complexities and moral dilemmas of society and its government.

Quaker faith & practice 24.00, 1994

22.12 A commitment to peace is central to the Quaker way, although not all Friends describe themselves as pacifists.

Friends recognise the painful dilemmas that can arise when weaker groups or nations are attacked or oppressed. In wartime, discerning how to respond to the violence of aggressors may be especially difficult.

22.13 Now, in the war, I do not think that any of us could doubt the colossal quality of the evil represented by Nazi philosophy. And I do not think that, in political terms, it was possible to contemplate coming to any sort of political compromise with it... Speaking personally as a Christian pacifist, I had a far deeper sense of spiritual unity with those of my friends in the fighting services who, detesting war as deeply as I did, yet felt that there was no other way in which they could share in the agony of the world, than I had with those pacifists who talked as if the suffering of the world could be turned off like a water tap if only politicians would talk sensibly together. Where men have sinned as grievously and as long as we have done in our social and international relations with one another, there can be no easy end to the consequences... We could not engage in warlike activity in the hope of relieving the suffering of

the Jews or of other oppressed peoples in Europe and Asia. We had, somehow, to try to participate in their suffering and to express the conviction that it is ultimately the power of suffering in love that redeems men from the power of evil.

Roger Wilson, 1949

22.14 Like many Friends I am not an absolute pacifist and have been exercised by my position on this ever since joining the Religious Society of Friends in the 1970s. In fact, most Friends who I speak with on this subject confess themselves to be not absolute in their pacifism, whilst remaining totally committed to being peace-builders...

There are two respectful references [in *Quaker faith & practice* Calder Catchpool (24.23) and Roger Wilson (24.24), 1994] by absolute pacifist Friends to those Quakers who examined their consciences and decided that, in the light of the threat to peace and justice by evil-doers who would not listen to argument or reason, they would have to be restrained by force...

Jesus never elaborated on what his followers should do were they in the position of, say, the Samaritan actually witnessing the beating up of the man he later discovered by the roadside. Jesus' personal injunction to 'turn the other cheek' and to 'walk the extra mile' relate to situations when we are personally wronged, not when we witness a wrong committed against a third party.

Don Rowe, 2017

22.15 Our religious understanding is that war is failure. Modern warfare is failure on a colossal scale. It is failure in the following ways: failure to love our neighbours as ourselves; failure to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us; failure to seek peace and pursue it; failure to leave no stone unturned in the search for a peaceful solution; failure even to imagine the limitless possibilities of peace that are before us; failure of governments to protect us through

dialogue and diplomacy; failure of parliaments to uphold the basic principles of international law and ethical norms which call for utmost restraint in the spilling of blood; failure of military strategies and policies of 'deterrence' which are supposedly offered to us as a means to prevent such wars.

As a faith community with these crucial understandings we need to equip ourselves carefully to face those who disagree with us.

Marigold Bentley, 2014

22.16 Early Quakers did not deny others the right to defend themselves. They felt empowered to be a peaceable people and the beginning of a movement for peace throughout the world:

I speak not against any magistrates or peoples defending themselves against foreign invasions; or making use of the sword to suppress the violent and evil-doers within their borders – for this the present estate of things may and doth require, and a great blessing will attend the sword where it is borne uprightly to that end and its use will be honourable... but yet there is a better state, which the Lord hath already brought some into, and which nations are to expect and to travel towards. There is to be a time when 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more'. When the power of the Gospel spreads over the whole earth, thus shall it be throughout the earth, and, where the power of the Spirit takes hold of and overcomes any heart at present, thus will it be at present with that heart. This blessed state, which shall be brought forth [in society] at large in God's season, must begin in particulars [i.e. in individuals].

Isaac Penington, 1661

22.17 A commitment to peaceful methods and the rejection of violence is part of an active appeal to the Inward Light in others. Active nonviolence aims to transform situations of injustice by demonstrating creative ways of resolving conflict:

We believe that the primary Christian duty in relation to others is to appeal to 'that of God' in them, and, therefore, any method of oppression or violence that renders such an appeal impossible must be set on one side.

London Yearly Meeting, 1920

22.18 During a period of severe political violence in Northern Ireland, Friends were able to play a special role in peacebuilding as a result of our peace testimony:

Establishing pacifist credentials has taken us collectively a long time, and entailed quite some suffering. How can a group without hierarchy or creed demonstrate that it will not participate in war and 'fighting with outward weapons'? Only when individuals, one after another, across time and space, live out their convictions, so that choices made in different situations still seem to come together as a pattern. Amazingly, we are now widely known as people who will not fight in wars. Not only this, we are almost as widely known for having intervened in wars to try to alleviate suffering on all sides...

Beyond the general notion of pacifism, the situation here has lent a special urgency to our reputation for harmlessness. By this I mean that, as a Friend, I am not only unwilling to serve as a soldier, but unwilling to take up arms in my private capacity. This may not sound like much, but it puts me in a special relationship to political leaders here: they believe that I will not kill them. And they don't believe that of everyone they meet. More to the point, they accept that I don't want them dead, even when I disagree with them. And this too is something they cannot take for granted. It is surprisingly freeing for all of us. I'm sure they don't want to kill me, either. So I feel free to agree with them sometimes, disagree sometimes, without worrying about who else I agree or disagree with in the process, and taking for granted that neither of us wishes to kill the other.

Sue Williams, 1988

Conscientious objection

22.19 During World War I, compulsory military service was introduced in Great Britain and Friends had to discern how to respond. In both world wars, some Friends joined the armed forces, some accepted non-combatant roles and others refused conscription altogether.

Conscientious objectors had to appear before tribunals to apply for an exemption from military service.

22.20 Corder Catchpool served voluntarily in the Friends Ambulance Unit during World War I. However, when conscription was introduced, he refused to comply and was imprisoned for more than two years. Later he worked for reconciliation between Britain and Germany. He told the court martial that sentenced him:

> There is hardly a moment when my thoughts are not with the men in France, eager to help the wounded by immediate human touch with their sufferings. This I was privileged to do during nineteen months spent at the Front with the Friends Ambulance Unit from October 1914 to May 1916, when it was still possible to give voluntary service. At times the impulse to return to this work becomes almost irresistible. May God steady me, and keep me faithful to a call I have heard above the roar of the guns. By the feverish activity of my hands, I might help to save a fraction of the present human wreckage. That would be for me no sacrifice. It costs far more to spend mind and spirit, if need be, in the silence of a prison cell, in passionate witness for the great truths of Peace. That is the call I hear. I believe that only spiritual influence will avail to free the world at last from war, to free the soldiers' little ones and confused struggling humanity itself from all that men and women are suffering now. I honour those who, in loyalty to conscience, have gone out to fight. In a crisis like the present it would be unbecoming to elaborate the reasons which have led me to a course so different. Today a man must act. I believe, with the strength of my whole being, that standing here I am enlisted in

active service as a soldier of Jesus Christ, who bids every man be true to the sense of duty that is laid upon his soul.

Corder Catchpool, 1918

22.21 Women have also been conscientious objectors, and some have suffered imprisonment for their witness against war:

I have sometimes been asked what were my reasons for deciding on that refusal to register for war duties that sent me to Holloway Jail 22 years ago. I can only answer that my reason told me that I was a fool, that I was risking my job and my career, that an isolated example could do no good, that it was a futile gesture since even if I did register my three small children would exempt me. But reason was fighting a losing battle. I had wrestled in prayer and I knew beyond all doubt that I must refuse to register, that those who believed that war was the wrong way to fight evil must stand out against it however much they stood alone, and that I and mine must take the consequences. The 'and mine' made it more difficult, but I question whether children ever really suffer loss in the long run through having parents who are willing to stand by principles; many a soldier had to leave his family and thought it his duty to do so. When you have to make a vital decision about behaviour, you cannot sit on the fence. To decide to do nothing is still a decision, and it means that you remain on the station platform or the airstrip when the train or plane has left.

Kathleen Lonsdale, 1964

Disarmament

22.22 Our opposition to war is not limited to a personal decision to refuse to fight. Quakers have a long history of working for international disarmament, calling for the reduction and eventual abolition of weapons.

22.23 After World War I, Philip Noel-Baker wrote:

> Our generation must get rid of the militarization of the world... It is a deep-rooted and malignant disease for which palliatives do not suffice, and of which civilized society may die if it be not ended.

Philip Noel-Baker, 1925

22.24 During the Cold War, Quakers campaigned alongside many others for the elimination of nuclear weapons:

> We are, I trust, steadfast in emphasising hope not fear as the driving force for disarmament. I doubt whether it is even a successful tactic, to motivate people by playing on their fear of death and destruction in a nuclear war; fear can as well engender paralysis as frenzied activity. But even if it were successful, that would not make it right. Quaker approaches to disarmament have largely avoided the temptation to appeal to fear. It is important that we continue to resist that temptation. To place the emphasis instead on hope, and the positive achievements we associate with disarmament, does not mean embracing a shallow optimism. It means relating our hopes for disarmament, our hopefulness, to the Christian understanding of hope, which is something much more profound.

Nicholas A Sims, 1985

22.25 In 1986, 48,000 ordinary people, including many Quakers, linked hands at the Arms Around Scotland demonstration. This account is by Ruth Baldry, from Glasgow Quaker meeting, who was ten years old at the time:

> We put our arms around Scotland on the 5th of October. All over Scotland, ordinary people turned out to demonstrate for peace. Young children, teenagers, ladies and men and old people all went to stand at certain points around Scotland to hold hands from Glasgow to Grangemouth...

We saw banners and four helicopters and on *Voyager* (the TV programme) it showed pictures from the line. We were there to show other people that we don't want nuclear weapons in Scotland. We all hope that we shall send the message across to people who want bombs that not many people want bombs or other weapons in Scotland.

All along the line everybody was happy because lots of people had joined in and they were glad of other people's company.

Ruth Baldry, 1989

22.26 Jo Winstanley reflects on a lifetime of peace activism:

Pacifism connects me through time with Quakers. My Quaker beginnings in the 1980s wove fear of nuclear annihilation with hope of a spirit-led alternative.

At the 'Embrace the Base' demonstration at Greenham Common, in which women linked hands around the perimeter fence, I held my aunt's hand, knowing that somewhere else out of sight, around the fence, the chain included my mother and many Friends.

On another occasion, on a bus to Greenham with Sheffield Friends, I travelled with Jessie Baston: a life-long pacifist and highly principled campaigner, by this time quite elderly. I remember her, in her sensible lace-up shoes and warm coat buttoned up, climbing carefully out of the bus, into the vibrant atmosphere of chanting and singing, a contrast in her sturdy style maybe, but united in a spirit of determination and a need to be there, to acknowledge the evil of nuclear weapons and to be a witness to the possibility of a peaceful future.

Jo Winstanley, 2025

22.27 Quakers today continue to work for the abolition of weapons, including opposition to the arms trade. Rosie Horsley describes taking part in nonviolent direct action to disrupt an international arms fair in London:

We slowly made our way through to the silent gathering of Quakers who stood 300-strong in the road to the venue, placards aloft and peaceful faces resolute. I learned that the roads had been held since early in the morning by strong collective action...

My thoughts were guided by those people who couldn't be with us in that road. The people who had been murdered, injured, traumatised and displaced from their homes and lives because of the weapons industry...

So, when I heard [the police order] 'move off the road', I fastened my bag tight and sat, waiting... There was such stillness, such peace [in] loud voice of my faith, conscience and the collective power that [it] felt like [they] resonated through all of us [and] glued me fast to the tarmac.

Rosie Horsley, 2019

For more on civil disobedience, see 23: Quakers and wider society. For guidance on nonviolent direct action, see the Resources.

Building peace

22.28 Quakers are active in many ways to help build a society that is free from the seeds of war. Individual Friends and Quaker organisations work to build peaceful relationships between individuals, communities and nations. These efforts include nonviolence training, mediation and peace education, as the following two reflections show.

22.29 Conflict is a part of life, a necessary result of the varying needs, aims and perspectives of individuals and communities. It is part of our daily experience, both directly and through television and other news media. The ethos of the home, school or workplace will provide some rules (spoken and unspoken) for handling conflict situations. However, these often contradict each other and the pressures from friends and peer groups can work against the 'official' ways of handling conflict. Society educates young

people at best haphazardly and at worst quite destructively as far as conflict is concerned. From an early age, people are led to think that conflicts should be settled by someone in authority: the parent, the teacher, the headteacher, the gangleader, the policeman, the judge, the boss, the president. If there is nobody to arbitrate, then the 'strongest' will 'win' and the 'weaker' will 'lose'. Traditionally, little encouragement has been given to young people to take responsibility for resolving conflicts, to look for 'win-win' solutions. Yet the way in which young people learn to respond to conflict will have a pervasive effect both on the quality of their personal lives and on the prospects for society as a whole. Affirming the personal value of each individual, encouraging mutual respect and consciously developing the skills and attitudes involved in creative conflict resolution must be regarded as an important educational priority.

Sue Bowers and Tom Leimdorfer, 1990

22.30 Friends' peace testimony challenges us all to be peace educators. We may not all be teachers, but we are all communicators, and we all need to be learners. Peace education should be seen as an integral part of our peace testimony. But it is essentially something one does, and not something one talks about... Learning, to be educated, means changing one's behaviour, and peace education therefore aims at changing our own individual behaviour... We communicate our values by the manner of our lives, but how many of us negate the peaceful attitudes we fervently profess by our own aggressive behaviour?

Eva I Pinthus, 1982

22.31 Quaker organisations engage in mediation and conciliation in many parts of the world. This work requires long-term commitment to building relationships with people on opposing sides of a conflict, and it can involve personal risk:

> Perhaps the most distinctive element of the Quaker approach [to conciliation] has been patience and commitment… At its best, this patience is not just stubbornness. Nor is it a naive optimism not grounded in political realities. Neither of these attitudes would be of much value to those directly involved in the conflict. Rather, it is an outward manifestation of a confidence that situations can improve, and that individuals have the potential to change and take initiatives which can open up new ways forward. It is a recognition of the potential of the individual and the power of a force which is not governed by material or selfish considerations. By their very presence, they can convey the belief that human relations do not have to be as they are, and the belief in people's capacity to make a difference.
>
> Clem McCartney and Sue Williams, 2020

22.32 In Quaker communities, young Friends continue to learn and practise the skills of mediation and conflict transformation, which they bring to their schools, families and communities:

> We discussed how conflict and cooperation can co-exist and both are needed to expand our ideas and perspectives. Different opinions enrich us as a community. We also discussed how to deal with conflict and tensions, and how important it is to remember to not disagree with the person, but with the idea. We spoke about respecting differences, and how when differences in opinion arise, we can work together to achieve a win-win outcome; someone doesn't always have to 'lose'.
>
> Junior Gathering, 2022

For more on Quaker witness, see 19: Spiritual roots of Quaker witness, 20: Witness in daily life and 21: Witness with others. For guidance on mediation, peace education and conciliation, see the Resources.

Chapter 23:

Quakers and wider society

23.01 True godliness don't turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it.

William Penn, 1682

Introduction

23.02 What William Penn refers to as 'the world' includes secular, or non-religious, organisations. We all have day-to-day relationships with secular organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors, and they affect every area of our lives.

These organisations include local and national government as well as national agencies; public services such as education, health, transport, and utility providers; banks and financial services; charities and community groups; trades unions, political parties and campaign groups; and technology and media companies.

This chapter discusses how we live our faith as we engage with these organisations, as individual Friends and Quaker communities. It includes:

- Quaker testimony in wider society
- Oaths and affirmations
- Working for change
- Non-cooperation and civil disobedience

For Quakers' relationships with other religious organisations, see 24: Quakers and other faith communities.

Quaker testimony in wider society

23.03 The opening verse of Psalm 24, 'The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein' [King James Version] reminds us of our Quaker assertion that there is no separation between the sacred and the secular: that all times, all places, all beings, all actions, all thoughts, all intentions are in the realm of the sacred. Everything belongs to God.

Pam Lunn, 2011

23.04 In our everyday lives, we have a range of relationships with secular organisations, including as citizens, employees, customers, volunteers, and investors. As Quakers, we aim to practise our faith in all these relationships. Because we see all of life as sacred, we make no distinction between our faith practice and our behaviour in daily life with employers, public services, private companies, or the state.

Our relationships with organisations and the people who work in them are opportunities for Quaker witness in daily life. This includes acting with honesty and integrity as citizens, taxpayers, employers, employees, and customers. We can speak up for integrity, fairness and sustainability in our workplaces, political organisations and government. We can be cooperative and supportive colleagues and service users.

Through our relationships in workplaces, businesses and public services, we have opportunities to recognise and witness to the Light in all people. When we live our commitment to seeing the Light in every person, we contribute to a culture of greater mutual respect and care for each other. As we seek the Light in everyone, we can also learn from people in everyday contexts with different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.

For more on the foundations of Quaker witness, see 19: Spiritual roots of Quaker witness.

Oaths and affirmations

23.05 Throughout our history, Quakers have refused to swear oaths during court proceedings or for any other purpose. This is part of our Quaker testimony that includes speaking the truth in all situations.

In all legal contexts in Great Britain, Friends may exercise the right to make an affirmation rather than swearing an oath on the Bible.

23.06 And they gave me the Book, and I took it and was turning to a place that was against swearing, and they took it from me again and bid me say after the clerk. So I told them, if they would prove that Christ and the apostles commanded to swear after they had forbidden it, give us scripture for this, and we would swear. It was Christ's command that we should not swear.

George Fox, 1664

For more guidance on affirmations, see the Resources. For more on truthfulness and integrity, see 20: Witness in daily life.

Working for change

23.07 Remember your responsibility as citizens for the government of your town and country, and do not shirk the effort and time this may demand. Do not be content to accept things as they are, but keep an alert and questioning mind. Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice and fear, try to discern the new growing-points in social and economic life. Work for an order of society which will allow men and women to develop their capacities and will foster their desire to serve.

Advices, 1964

23.08 As individuals and as Quaker communities, there may be times when we are led to challenge an organisation's activities because they conflict

with our deepest values or with our collective testimony as Quakers.

Often, we will not be able to bring about change on our own. This may lead us to work with others for positive social change. Deciding which groups to work with and what forms of action to take part in may call for careful discernment, especially where potential allies do not share Quaker commitments to truthfulness or nonviolence.

23.09 The work we are called to do to bring about changes in society can take many forms. It may include lobbying politicians or officials; challenging bullying, discrimination or unfair employment practices; or protesting against corporate policies or investment decisions.

We should aim to carry out these actions in ways that are consistent with Quaker testimony. Even when we find ourselves in conflict over deeply held values, we should respect the humanity of those who disagree with us and aim to awaken their capacity to respond to the Light within them. We should also acknowledge our own limitations and remember that we too may be mistaken. Living out these insights will lead us to:

- practise active peacemaking in our behaviour and attitudes, including our use of language and social media
- take care to search out unbiased sources of information and discern truth from falsehood
- listen carefully to where others' words come from, and the needs and values that inform their actions
- search for potential areas of common ground and mutual understanding with allies and opponents
- persist, because changing hearts and minds often takes time and patience.

23.10 Richard Raggett describes his experience of engaging with the Scottish Parliament from a Scottish Quaker perspective:

> Scotland is lucky in that the Parliament seems accessible and welcoming to its citizens. That said, national politics seems to be constantly competitive and, at times, brutal and cruel. A ceremonial mace rests in the Parliament Chamber. It has four words engraved on it: Justice, Integrity, Wisdom and Compassion. As Quakers we can foster these values and the search for wisdom through seeking to build relationships, through listening as well as demanding change. I have found it an intensely human business. We have learned that starting a meeting with an MSP [Member of the Scottish Parliament] with a simple 'How is it going?' question can melt some of the distance and natural nerves. Truth and Integrity goes both ways; we cannot pretend to have all the answers any more than we can expect an elected representative to have them. We are all human and must start from an assumption that we are all doing our best to solve the problems at hand. I try to put myself in their shoes and ask myself 'What would I do?' before a meeting with an MSP. That can be pretty sobering if the climate crisis is before you, the prisons are full, and more and more people are unable to provide themselves with basic necessities of life. We can be angry and fired up about the problems, but we need to carry humility with us too. We can be Quakers.
>
> Richard Raggett, 2026

23.11 In her 2023 Swarthmore Lecture, Esther Loukin describes how she was led to challenge local businesses about their lack of accessibility for wheelchair users:

> Steps without an alternative are usually a fairly simple breach [of the Equality Act]. They can be measured and photographed. Both my relative privilege and my love of rules and procedures meant that I thought it would be relatively simple to get the difficulties acknowledged. So I made the very dubious decision, in hindsight, to use the law to fix the street. I felt I could do nothing else.
>
> Was that initial decision a Leading? I still don't know. I think it probably was. It's led me to some very interesting places since.

When I challenged those shops I was making a point about the little indignities of life as a wheelchair user. When an adjustment can enable me to go into somewhere, particularly when it's a cheap and easy adjustment and they've chosen not to make that adjustment, I'm excluded. And when this happens again and again and again, it sands away at my sense of being a full citizen. The steps were – are – symbolic. They say in repetitive and small ways 'You are not a person we consider a customer. You are not a member of the public. You are not a member of the community. You're separate and different.' They also squash spontaneity and choice and joy. I end up going to the same places, eating the same things, life-shrinking, or always having to do far more planning than others.

Esther Loukin, 2023

Non-cooperation and civil disobedience

23.12 Perchwch ddeddfau'r wladwriaeth ond boed eich teyrngarwch pennaf i fwriadau Duw. Os cymhellir chwi gan argyhoeddiad cryf i dorri'r ddeddf, chwiliwch eich cydwybod i'w ddyfnderau. Gofynnwch i'ch cwrdd am y gefnogaeth weddigar a'ch nertha wrth i'r llwybr cywir agor o'ch blaen.

Respect the laws of the state but let your first loyalty be to God's purposes. If you feel impelled by strong conviction to break the law, search your conscience deeply. Ask your meeting for the prayerful support which will give you strength as a right way becomes clear.

Cynghorion a holiadau / Advices & queries 35, 1994

23.13 In a democratic society, Quakers respect the rule of law and the institutions that protect people's rights and security. We also recognise our obligations to the organisations we have agreements with, including employers and businesses, and their legitimate rules and practices.

There may also be times when to comply with a particular law or organisational requirement would violate our conscience or our Quaker

testimony. Quakers have a long history of opposing authorities that cause harm to people and the natural world, or restrict religious and political freedoms.

In these situations, we may be led to try to persuade institutions to change laws or policies. We will often find it helpful to work with allies, including outside the Quaker community. When we work with other faith groups, charities and campaigns, we may find that their approaches differ from our own. These different perspectives can be creative as well as challenging.

23.14 If efforts at persuasion and campaigning are unsuccessful, we may be called to accept the situation and wait for future opportunities for change. In some cases, Friends may be led to refuse cooperation with an organisation's requirements or to publicly disobey an unjust law. Before doing so, we should test our leading carefully with the support of our Quaker community, to be as sure as possible that we have discerned rightly. Quaker discernment practices such as meetings for clearness are often helpful for this purpose.

If we feel impelled to disobey the law or refuse to cooperate with an institution, we should be prepared to act openly, accountably and nonviolently, and to accept the potential penalties. These may be severe and have long-lasting consequences, including fines, job losses or imprisonment.

When a Friend suffers penalties for a form of witness that has been tested and affirmed by their Quaker community, the community should be prepared to support them. This support may take practical, financial or spiritual forms.

For more on testing leadings and meetings for clearness, see 4: Quaker discernment. For guidance on civil disobedience, see the Resources.

For more on working for social change, see 19: Spiritual roots of Quaker witness, 20: Witness in daily life, 21: Witness with others, and 22: Our peace testimony.

Chapter 24:

Quakers and other faith communities

24.01 The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the diverse liveries they wear here makes them strangers.

William Penn, 1693

Introduction

24.02 This chapter discusses Quaker relationships with other churches and faith communities. It describes the spiritual basis of these relationships and various aspects of how they work in practice. It relates to the ecumenical and interfaith work of individual Friends, of Quaker meetings and of Britain Yearly Meeting as a whole.

In this chapter, 'ecumenical' refers to relationships between different Christian traditions and groups. 'Interfaith' refers to activities and bodies that bring together different religious traditions and spiritual communities, including some that would not characterise themselves as religious.

This chapter includes:

- Quakers and religious diversity
- Principles of Quaker ecumenical and interfaith work
- Britain Yearly Meeting and ecumenical relationships

Quakers and religious diversity

24.03 Living with religious diversity and difference is normal for Quakers in Britain. We have always been a minority religious group, often a very visible one. Our difference from majority religious practice has, at various times, been recognised and accommodated in law.

In twenty-first-century Britain, Quakers live with religious diversity in many ways. Many Friends have experience of other churches or faith communities. Many of us have close family members in other faith groups. We all live our Quaker faith in a multifaith and secular society. As Quaker communities, we have various formal and informal relationships with other faith groups.

Although we all live with religious diversity, we do not all engage in ecumenical or interfaith work. It is one form of ministry among many, and our Quaker communities can uphold those who are called to this work without requiring it of everyone.

24.04 Our relationships with other faith communities are grounded in our own spiritual life. Our Quaker experience gives us the confidence to be unafraid of religious difference. We are confident that God calls, guides and empowers us in our Quaker life and witness, and that the same God can call, guide and empower each person we meet.

24.05 Mary Fisher, who travelled to Turkey (now Türkiye) in 1657 to speak to Sultan Mehmed IV about the Quaker understanding of God, wrote about the Muslim communities she encountered there:

> They are more near Truth than many nations; there is a love begot in me towards them which is endless... the seed of them is near unto God, and their kindness hath in some measure been shown towards his servants.
>
> Mary Fisher, 1657

For more on varieties of Quaker ministry, see 9: Service in the Quaker community.

Principles of Quaker ecumenical and interfaith work

Loving our neighbours

24.06 In encounters with other people of faith, as Quakers we find the confidence to love our neighbours. Religious differences offer opportunities to see God at work in others and to learn from them. We know that we do not need to be alike in belief or practice to be united in love.

24.07 At a time when Christians were persecuting other Christians, Isaac Penington wrote an appeal for religious toleration:

> It is not the different practice from one another that breaks the peace and unity, but the judging one another because of different practices...
>
> And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning and loving one another in their several places and different performances to their Master, to whom they are to give an account, and not to quarrel with one another about their different practices. For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in him... and this is far more pleasing to me than if he walked just in that track wherein I walk.
>
> Isaac Penington, 1660

24.08 Often, the everyday practice of loving our neighbours in diverse communities draws us naturally into interfaith or ecumenical relationships, as Christine Trevett writes:

> There are initiatives... which may be interfaith by nature, if not in primary intent. In South Wales, one is called Peace Feast. It was started by some evangelical Christians in Cardiff and involves a

meal, maybe in a church, mosque, etc., but is not only intended for the religious person. Asylum seekers, etc., can be among those who go along. At each session, one person tells their story, or two are juxtaposed: a story which sometimes may have involved great hardship and a long journey to end up in South Wales and/or which may have a religious dimension. I know a number of Friends who go along. I know many more, of course, who are volunteers with bigger initiatives to support refugees and asylum seekers – indeed, who have given rooms in their homes to people who need them... This may involve interfaith or Christian ecumenical encounter by default.

Christine Trevett, 2016

Joining with others

24.09 Practising love for our neighbours involves the confidence to join with others. Quakers in Britain are part of many local and national ecumenical and interfaith initiatives. Some of these are long-established partnerships, involving a commitment to journey together and to seek deeper unity in different ways. Others involve short-term cooperation for specific purposes. These may be focused on shared action for the good of a local community, or gathering for spiritual fellowship outside formal faith structures.

Our historical commitment to peacemaking draws us especially to ecumenical and interfaith activities that seek to make faith a source of reconciliation and healing for the world. This shared commitment can enable us to reach across deep differences.

24.10 We would wish to unite with all Christians and also with those of other faiths who work for reconciliation and healing in a broken world... As Friends we wish to recognise the divine gifts in those who call God by other names or see their commitment to truth in very different ways.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

24.11 Judith Baker wrote of her experience of an interfaith peace walk, co-organised by Quakers and a Buddhist organisation:

> For me, participating in the walk was like being in a gathered Quaker Meeting. I was totally in a state of deep contemplation as we walked. I felt a deep unity both of spirit and of commitment to peace with those of other faiths around me. What was achieved? On one level, Plum Village and Quakers in Britain, two contemplative traditions, came together for peace and somehow gathered ten different faith representatives to offer prayers for peace, and all walked silently together for peace. On a deeper level, I hope that, like me, most if not all present found a connection to each other and a recommitment to peace.

Judith Baker, 2024

24.12 In interfaith and ecumenical settings, Quaker practices of deep listening and finding unity in shared silence and action, rather than forms of words, may be valuable in bringing people together:

> I personally believe that there is a quality in the bareness of Christian Quakerism, which may act as a bridge between the past and the future, allowing space for Friends to dare to search within... To be a Quaker is by no means to say goodbye to myth, ritual and symbol, but rather to find myself set free to discover them as the very essence of the way I now experience... Quakers are bridge people.

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1985

24.13 Chaplaincy in interfaith and ecumenical teams is one of the contexts in which Quakers' 'bridging' role can be especially valuable. Quaker university chaplain Robin Fishwick writes:

> Chaplaincy teams are often glad to have a Quaker amongst them. In addition to whatever personal skills the Quaker chaplain

> can bring, the Friend concerned may be skilled in promoting team cooperation, able to offer spiritual support regardless of theology and provide a spiritual space based at a meeting for worship happy to accommodate the diversity of the people we serve.
>
> Robin Fishwick, 2014

24.14 As a Quaker hospital chaplain on an interfaith team, Joannie Harrison reflects on the different kinds of 'connectedness' that Quakers bring to chaplaincy work:

> As Quakers we speak of knowing each other in those things which are eternal, and there have been many times when I've felt this sense of connectedness in the hospital. When someone is facing death, or the brutal reality of life, they speak their truth. There is no act put on, no protective persona put forward, and they want the same authenticity in return... This connectedness, this sense of being accompanied in some way on their journey, is what makes the difference to patients. It's what they are looking for in a chaplain. As Quakers we can think outside the box, which puts us in a very strong position for connecting with people.
>
> Joannie Harrison, 2014

For more on Quaker peacemaking, see 22: Our peace testimony. For more on Quaker chaplaincy, see 9: Service in the Quaker community.

24.15 Not every interfaith or ecumenical initiative is right for Quakers to join collectively. We may need to discern whether being publicly linked to a specific ecumenical or interfaith initiative is consistent with Quaker testimony. A common example is when local meetings are invited to join other churches and faith groups in Remembrance Sunday ceremonies. Friends in one local meeting describe how they manage this situation:

We have never attempted, or wished, to get involved in the main 'red poppy' event at the cenotaph in Hexham on Remembrance Sunday, but have obtained permission from the town council to lay our white poppy wreath on the Saturday, which hasn't been a problem. [It's] important to mention that our white wreath with 50 white poppies also contains four red ones, one at each cardinal point. Perhaps because of this, the wreath has always remained with all the others throughout the winter months.

Hexham Meeting, quoted by
Ben Pink Dandelion, 2018

24.16 Sometimes a Quaker community may decide to support and encourage individual Friends in a particular initiative, instead of making a collective commitment.

For more on Quaker testimony and peacemaking, see 5: Quaker testimony and 22: Our peace testimony.

Receiving and giving hospitality

24.17 Our ecumenical and interfaith work commonly includes receiving and giving hospitality. Friends will often have opportunities to attend worship in the traditions of other churches and faith communities, and to share Quaker worship with others. Receiving and giving hospitality in this way can deepen our understanding of God, as well as our relationships with people from other traditions.

24.18 Living as a Quaker in the Orkney mainland, a welcoming community to many from the south who move to live here, I've discovered an informal ecumenical life as many incomers, including Friends, worship with their local church as well as with the Quaker Meeting. There are also Friends living in Westray and Papa Westray, two of the North Isles. The meeting was established in the 1980s with Friends meeting in each other's homes. More recently we have met in various community venues, including

St Magnus Cathedral, and now have a settled home with the United Reform Church in Kirkwall who have made us warmly welcome, meeting after their service. The island culture is one that encourages community. So if there is a need and someone has the gift to meet it, then it is welcomed regardless of who you are or where you've come from. So I've found myself playing the organ at my local Episcopalian service and for funerals in my local Church of Scotland, and singing in the cathedral choir, as do others. There have also been opportunities to participate in ecumenical meditation and prayer groups, with retreats in daily life and residential retreats, where Friends have been well represented.

Derek McLean, 2025

24.19 When people from all the churches meet in depth, in love and in truth, we can engage with each other in a truly relational ecumenism.

When we understand our own faith, we develop both a confident voice and a confident Quaker heart; we move beyond being simply representatives of our churches each with our denominational labels, and we meet as people, changing, developing, growing and learning together. Can the Spirit of Love help us all to move forward?

Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relationships, 2009

24.20 Quakers who share worship with other communities may learn from the experience of Friends who belong to more than one religious tradition. In the following examples, the writers describe how different faith practices complement each other.

24.21 In Quaker meeting I silently recite the Muslim prayers; after prayers in the Mosque I seek the spirit in myself and others in silent worship, as I do in Quaker meetings.

Christopher Bagley, 2015

24.22 I came to the Society as a Buddhist, not to escape from Buddhism, but because I thought that the Quaker meeting was a meditation group. When I soon learned that it is not – at least not in the Buddhist sense – I did discover that there was much more to Quakerism than I had supposed. So I stayed. I did not, and still do not, find any conflict between Buddhism and Quakerism... Labels are not important, unless you want them to be.

Jim Pym, 1999

24.23 I remain proud of my Jewish heritage and culture. Introducing myself to a group or chatting to a newcomer I usually tell them that I have Jewish roots. When I was co-facilitating a course for Quakers with Jewish roots... as we celebrated our Sabbath meal on the Friday night there was a familiarity, not just because of the evocative foods that were in front of us but at a deeper, spiritual and cultural level that we recognised in one another.

On the face of it, there is little in common between the two faiths. They sit at opposite ends of the Judaic-Christian spectrum. Judaism is a religion of law and seeks above all the objective standard of justice; my Quakerism is about openness to the spirit in whatever form it comes, and a desire for equality and subjective truth. To be an observant Jew means following time-honoured, traditional forms of worship. As a Quaker, I have been freed up to be and find myself.

Yet both are at their heart mystical religions, assuming the possibility of a direct relationship with God. It was this similarity that felt comfortable when I started attending Meeting for Worship. Both offer demanding guidance for the whole of life, not just for times of formal worship. My Jewish roots strengthen my belief that God is there to be talked with; being a Quaker has given me opportunities to deepen and grow my spiritual life, to explore my faith openly and take it forward.

Andy Stoller, 2009

For more on theological diversity within Quakers, see 3: Quaker theology.

Being ourselves and speaking our truths

24.24 In our ecumenical and interfaith relationships, we also need the confidence to be ourselves and to speak our truths. We cannot serve truth and love by denying our experience or Quaker testimony. This principle goes back to the beginnings of the Quaker movement, when the young George Fox first accepted an invitation to share hospitality with other seekers after truth and then realised he could not go along with everything they were doing:

> I... went in with them, for I loved any that had a sense of good, or that did seek after the Lord. And... they began to drink healths and called for more drink, agreeing together that he that would not drink should pay for all. I was grieved that any that made profession of religion should offer to do so... wherefore I rose up to be gone and, putting my hand into my pocket, I took out a groat and laid it down upon the table before them and said, 'If it be so, I'll leave you.'
>
> George Fox, 1643

24.25 Quakers engage with people from different traditions, confidently expecting to find common ground with all who 'have a sense of good' or who seek God. Like George Fox, though, we sometimes find that our discernment places us at odds with fellow seekers.

When attending worship in other traditions, we may need to consider whether we can use words or act in ways that suggest beliefs we do not share. We can respect a way of worship and the people involved, without accepting it as our own. For example, Quakers should not be afraid to maintain our testimony that all of life is sacred, which means we do not rely on outward sacraments such as the bread and wine of the eucharist.

24.26 When we find ourselves representing Friends in worship arranged by other churches we may have to make difficult decisions about the extent of our involvement. The difficulty is particularly acute in eucharistic worship, where different forms of eucharistic sharing are

now frequently offered and are commonly seen by other Christians as both the means and the end of unity. Friends' testimony is to a corporate life and experience of God which does not depend on the observance of outward sacraments. Abstaining from the outward sacraments does not inevitably follow from this, but is one way of witnessing to it, particularly when the importance of the outward sacraments in building up the life of the church is being stressed.

Quaker faith & practice 9.19, 1994

24.27 Quakers' long experience in the ecumenical movement is that our unusual perspective is often valued, even when it makes things more difficult. However, we may face difficult choices about when and how to make our difference visible.

24.28 Janet Scott reflects on the challenges of ecumenism in a church without creeds or sacramental rituals, and on what Quakers can contribute:

When we start to state our position positively we are putting forward a very serious challenge. For we are talking about Christianity as a way of life which puts God at the centre and sees dependence on the Holy Spirit as a daily gift... We... are making a very bold claim about being able to be recognised as Christian through what we do rather than what we say. To put our lives, individually and corporately, forward as evidence for our faith is perhaps the scariest challenge of all!

Bringing Quakers into the midst... could give a new perspective, one where visible unity is in the love, encouragement and questioning we give each other, and where the differences between us become recognised diversities when they build up the life of the church and enable us to be witnesses to God at work in the world. But are we brave enough to come out of our little corner and speak a clear message that can be heard? And are others willing to listen?

Janet Scott, 2001

24.29 Some of the most difficult challenges emerge when our willingness to engage is met with rejection. When Hannah Brock Womack was asked to accept nomination as a president of Churches Together in England (CTE), she agreed despite her misgivings. In the event, her appointment was not accepted by CTE because she was married to a woman. She reflected afterwards on the experience of the appointment and the controversy that followed:

> I felt led to say yes [to the initial nomination] because I had a feeling that my disquiet with hierarchical religion might be a voice that was needed, rather than a reason to step away. I knew there would be difficult choices to face as I was invited to events, or to be involved in initiatives, that a lesbian, left-wing, pacifist follower of Jesus wouldn't usually have any connection with at all, but I hoped I would be given the words I needed...
>
> [When the appointment was rejected] part of me found it utterly bizarre. Did they want to know my gifts, my experience or my hopes for the role? Apparently not... I believed, as many others did, that we were all in this together, and working with individuals and leaders with whom we profoundly disagree was what we signed up for... It has been infuriating to be typecast solely as someone in a same-sex marriage (joyful and central as that marriage is to my life!), when I felt like I could bring so much more. I wanted to speak up for the radical, grassroots, nonviolent Christian tradition within which I stand. I wanted to see where the Spirit would lead, and what else I could bring to the table...
>
> After [the appointment was rejected], the 4PG [Fourth Presidency Group of churches within CTE, which includes Quakers] met to work out a response.
>
> I didn't know what to expect when I went into that meeting, but it felt beautifully united, Spirit-led and productive – what I had hoped ecumenical work could be... The [group] has worked together in a new, collaborative way, and has agreed to keep working together in this way in the future.

> Despite the pain we have endured, I hope Quakers can stay within CTE. Ecumenical work is about working with people who we might not agree with but try to love anyway.
>
> Hannah Brock Womack, 2023

Listening and being challenged

24.30 If we speak our truth, we can expect and trust others to do the same. Our interfaith and ecumenical relationships will require us to listen and be challenged, and to hold spaces where different views can be expressed.

Early Quakers were persecuted for preaching and practising their faith. We have a tradition of supporting religious freedom and freedom of conscience, not only for ourselves but for everyone. This is a spiritual treasure of our tradition that we can bring into interfaith and ecumenical relationships. It brings the confidence to live with deep differences, without giving up our commitment to truth.

24.31 Henry T Hodgkin, a Quaker missionary to China in the early twentieth century, wrote about the understanding he reached through his many interfaith and ecumenical encounters:

> I believe that God's best for another may be so different from my experience and way of living as to be actually impossible to me... God needs all kinds of people and ways of living through which to manifest himself in the world... I really find myself wanting to learn from people whom I previously would have regarded as fit objects for my 'missionary zeal'. To discover another way in which God is operating – along lines it may be distasteful or dangerous to me – is a large part of the fun of living. [Another] direction in which conduct is influenced is the deliberate attempt to share the life and interests of others who are not in my circle... in such sharing I can most deeply understand the other's life and through that reach, maybe, fresh truths about God.
>
> Henry T Hodgkin, 1933

24.32 In this process of listening and being challenged, it is important not to stereotype or generalise about people from other traditions. We would not wish any one person to be seen as representative of all Quakers, and we should extend the same principle to members of other churches and faith communities.

Britain Yearly Meeting and ecumenical relationships

24.33 Quakers have been active in the modern ecumenical movement since its beginnings in the early twentieth century. As the movement grew and as structures were established, new questions arose about which structures Quakers could join and on what terms. One major challenge is that as Quakers we have historically had a testimony against the use of creeds, and we will not join any bodies that require their member churches to accept a fixed statement of belief.

24.34 In Britain, Quakers were associate members of the British Council of Churches (BCC) from 1942 to 1990, while the BCC required full members to accept a formal statement of faith. Many local ecumenical bodies, and the Council of Churches for Wales, also required acceptance of a statement of faith. Where this was the case, Quakers participated as associate members or observers.

When the BCC was re-formed as the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland (later Churches Together in Britain and Ireland), Quakers were accepted into full membership. This was possible because the new body had a clause in its constitution stating that:

> A church, which on principle has no credal statements in its tradition and therefore cannot formally subscribe to the statement of faith in the Basis, may nevertheless apply for and be elected to full membership provided that it satisfies those member churches which subscribe to the Basis that it manifests faith in Christ as witnessed to in the Scriptures and is committed to the aims and purposes of the new ecumenical body, and that it will work in the spirit of the Basis.

The 'Basis' reads:

> The Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland is a fellowship of churches in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Yearly Meeting decisions in 1989 and 1997 confirmed Quakers' acceptance of membership in the new 'four nations' body, and hence in the ecumenical bodies for Wales, Scotland and England.

When the World Council of Churches was formed in 1948, Britain Yearly Meeting decided not to join because we saw the basis as being credal. We are formally connected to the World Council of Churches through Friends World Committee for Consultation, which is represented as a Christian world communion.

24.35 Local ecumenical bodies and organisations take different approaches, which may make it harder or easier for Quakers to participate. Even if we cannot in conscience be full members of an organisation, there may be other ways of working together. Britain Yearly Meeting noted in the 1990s:

> Membership by a meeting of a particular ecumenical body may be impossible, for example because the wording of its Basis is unacceptably exclusive, or because the mutual recognition of ministers which is involved does not extend to the Quaker understanding of ministry, or because joint membership for all participating churches' members is required... If membership of a particular body proves impossible the meeting will have to consider how its relationships with other churches can be carried forward in different ways.
>
> *Quaker faith & practice* 9.18, 1994

24.36 Quaker membership of interfaith bodies will rarely raise concerns of this kind, but we should still consider the purposes and structure of each organisation, and to what extent it is compatible with Quaker testimony.

The principles outlined in this chapter may help to guide our ecumenical and interfaith relationships, whatever structures and opportunities are available to us in future.

For more on how Quakers are organised, see 12: Quaker meeting structures in Britain. For more information and guidance on Quaker ecumenical and interfaith work, see the Resources.

Chapter 25:

Sharing the Quaker way

25.01 It is part of our service to try to communicate the faith that we have tested in experience. We long to reach out to those who may find a spiritual home in the Society; we do not claim that ours is the only true way, yet we have a perception of truth that is relevant to all if, as we believe, the light to which we witness is a universal light. Each meeting must find its own way of sharing the Quaker experience, each Friend remember 'that we are each the epistle of Yearly Meeting'.

Quaker faith & practice 28.13, 1994

Introduction

25.02 The Quaker way does not belong to us. We hold it in trust for a time and are responsible for passing it on to others. Sharing the Quaker way is an act of open-heartedness towards people who are looking for a Spirit-led community.

How we welcome newcomers into our communities is important. When our communities are welcoming and inclusive, we build deeper relationships with each other. As we encourage newcomers to grow into belonging, we all benefit from the gifts and insights they bring.

This chapter includes:

- Spiritual hospitality
- Invitation
- Welcome
- Belonging
- Queries for sharing the Quaker way

Spiritual hospitality

25.03 The very simple heart of the early Quaker message is needed as much to-day as it ever was... The really universal thing is a living experience. It is reached in various ways, and expressed in very different language... The common bond is in the thing itself, the actual inner knowledge of the grace of God. Quakerism can only have a universal message if it brings men and women into this transforming knowledge. The early Friends certainly had this knowledge, and were the means of bringing many thousands of seekers into the way of discovery.

Henry T Hodgkin, 1916

25.04 Many people today are seeking what the Quaker way has to offer. They are looking for a community that is spiritually rooted, inclusive and committed to social justice. They want differences of belief to be respected and opportunities to explore their own spiritual experience.

Quakers recognise that there are many valid ways to discover and follow the leadings of the Spirit, and these ways may be suited to different people at different times in their lives. Our motivation for sharing the Quaker way is not to persuade or pressure anyone, but to practise spiritual hospitality.

We have been able to find something of value in the Quaker way because other Friends have shared it with us. Now we can share it with people who are seeking a Spirit-led community but have not yet found Quakers.

25.05 Newcomers bring their own spiritual gifts to our meetings. Our communities thrive when we offer a warm and generous welcome to new people, and share with them what we have found. As we work together to welcome and support newcomers, we often come to know each other more deeply and grow in our appreciation of the Quaker way.

Welcoming newcomers is the only way for our communities to become more diverse. As we welcome people with different backgrounds and life experiences, our worship and discernment may be deepened by a richer range of perspectives.

For more on Quaker community, see 6: The meaning of Quaker community and 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities.

Invitation

25.06 Outreach begins in our meetings for worship, in our family lives, and in our daily encounters with others. We can make our witness public through casual conversation, through lectures, letters to newspapers, published works, and radio and television appearances. Our witness may encourage action by others who have been shy or reticent. We broaden our fellowship and deepen our understanding of each other by sharing the insights and experiences that have led us to God.

New York Yearly Meeting, 2020

25.07 People who are looking for a faith community often need to feel invited and to know there is a Quaker community that will welcome them. It may be a big step for a seeker to come to a meeting for worship for the first time. Many people need to hear an invitation to Quakers several times before deciding to make contact.

Sharing the Quaker way begins with an invitation to explore and experience what it has to offer. An invitation is more than providing information. It includes listening to others' deepest values and questions and being willing to speak about our own.

As Quaker meetings, we can face outwards to people in our local area, building relationships with other communities and being visible and accessible to the public. We can invite newcomers through our buildings, our online presence, social media, participation in local community events, and public acts of Quaker witness.

25.08 Friends who developed the Quaker Quest outreach programme reflect on what they have learned from sharing the Quaker way with newcomers:

> We have learned that to share our faith is to grow in our faith, for we too have been changed and enriched in our Quakerism. In the persistent need to find words which express our deepest spiritual experiences we have been strengthened. We have become more articulate in speaking of the Quaker way. We have shared this challenge, supporting and offering guidance to each other. We can bear witness to the strengthening of the Quaker Quest team from our times of worship together in our planning meetings, in preparations to speak as presenters, and in the weekly session Meetings for Worship.

Quaker Quest, 2007

For more on the foundation for sharing the Quaker way, see 19: Spiritual roots of Quaker witness. For guidance on outreach activities and materials, see the Resources.

Welcome

25.09 If enquirers want to know what Friends are about, they will read the books – perhaps – but they will also read us.

Harvey Gillman, 1994

25.10 Welcoming newcomers begins with a genuine desire to get to know them, rather than simply offering information. Taking time to learn about people's spiritual life and interests is an important part of offering a warm and thoughtful welcome.

Some people may just want to try a meeting for worship and leave immediately afterwards. More often, newcomers want to meet Quakers and find out if they feel comfortable with us.

Some Quaker communities appoint Friends with a specific responsibility for welcoming newcomers. This may include inviting them to social events, shared meals or discussion groups; introducing them to other Friends; and letting them know about newsletters or mailing lists.

The accessibility of our buildings, resources and activities has a powerful impact on the quality of our welcome. When we plan for accessibility in advance and ask newcomers what they need to participate, we give a strong message that we care about them and want them to feel included.

For more on accessibility, see 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities.

25.11 First impressions are very important. We're so used to the way we do things and to our quaint Quaker lingo that we forget how it might come across – or not – to a stranger. When we welcome a guest at home, we try to make sure they are put at their ease and have everything they need. If a visitor asked you a question about the arrangements in your household, you wouldn't respond by giving them a leaflet! It's just the same in our Quaker 'home'. When strangers come to visit, they should be made welcome and treated with every consideration – as you would any guest. That's at the heart of what we mean by 'answering that of God in everyone'. (And it's what brings people back again and again.) It isn't just newcomers – we all have a need to feel we are welcome, and we all need to be clear about the 'house rules' both for our own benefit and the whole community's. By creating a welcoming community, we are making a safe space where we each feel valued and upheld, where we can offer our gifts, and where we can help each other to live adventurously in the Spirit and to follow the Quaker way. In other words, a flourishing Quaker meeting.

Stevie Krayer, 2012

25.12 Kevin Redpath describes introducing a new approach to help newcomers feel more welcome in his local meeting:

I decided to gently introduce a few tables and chairs to our after-meeting refreshments. At first Friends were taken aback: 'Why are we sitting down today – I thought shared lunch was every third Sunday?' 'No', I would explain, 'it provides an opportunity to share refreshments with our guests while sitting around a table.' It is amazing how the very act of sitting down together can draw us into deeper conversations – 'let's sit down and have a chat about this'. It is more friendly for the infirm who cannot stand comfortably for any length of time and less imposing for very young children who have to wander through a forest of legs to reach the biscuit tin. Quakers don't have communion but we do commune with one another over refreshments, so why not make it as inclusive and welcoming an experience as possible?

Kevin Redpath, 2012

Belonging

25.13 Sometimes attenders have complained of feeling that 'real Quakers' are part of a closed group and that it's very difficult to get involved as an outsider. We may believe we are being kind and courteous in sharing tasks amongst ourselves rather than asking a newcomer – but there's a danger we can give a patronising impression or leave the new attender feeling useless and left out. When there are jobs needing to be done, don't forget a newcomer may well have useful skills and be willing and eager to help. Showing we value what they have to offer is one of the best ways of making a newcomer feel welcome.

Stevie Krayer, 2012

25.14 Newcomers need a way to grow into a sense of belonging within a Quaker community. This means building and deepening relationships with Friends in their local meeting and beyond. Opportunities for discussion and learning, spiritual friendship groups, acts of Quaker witness, joint projects, and shared meals are all ways for newcomers to feel more at home in the community.

Quaker communities often have unspoken rules about behaviour, and these can be hard for newcomers to work out just from watching others. It is helpful to newcomers when we explain the discipline of Quaker practices, but judgement and criticism should be avoided.

For many of us, being invited to contribute to the community for the first time was an important step towards feeling we belonged. Opportunities for Quaker service include informal or occasional tasks, as well as appointed roles. We should avoid burdening newcomers with weighty responsibilities, but inviting them to help in appropriate ways shows trust and builds relationships. Encouraging new Friends to consider formal membership also tells them that they belong in the Quaker community and that their contribution is seen and valued.

25.15 Families, children and younger adults are all equal parts of our communities. Quaker activities should be planned in consultation with all age groups, to ensure they meet a range of needs and avoid unintentionally excluding people.

25.16 Newcomers bring new needs and perspectives, and a community will often need to change in response to these. A Quaker community does not belong to its most established members. Flexibility and a willingness to respond to fresh insights help our communities to grow and thrive.

For more on contributing to our communities, see 9: Service in the Quaker community.

Queries for sharing the Quaker way

25.17 How do we invite seekers to experience Quaker worship and community? Are we visible and engaged with the local community? Do we look for opportunities to share our activities and events with others, and to listen to their deepest values and experiences as well as sharing our own?

25.18 Do we take care that our activities and resources are accessible and inclusive? Is our meeting space accessible, attractive and comfortable? Is the language we use clear to newcomers, and do we explain Quaker terms and practices? Do we actively invite people of all ages, including families with young children?

25.19 Are we willing to risk being open with others about our experience of the Quaker way? As Friends, we use a wide range of language to describe our beliefs and experience. Can we speak with confidence in the words that are most meaningful to us? Personal stories told with confidence and enthusiasm carry conviction that a leaflet or book may not.

25.20 Do we welcome newcomers warmly to our communities and events? Do we take care to avoid assumptions about them based on their age or appearance, and take a real interest in their unique life journey? If we are the only Quaker they have ever spoken to, what impression will they take away? We all share responsibility for offering hospitality to newcomers and making sure they feel included.

25.21 How do we enable newcomers to deepen their sense of belonging? Are we open to including new Friends and to trying new ways of doing things? Do we share meals, socialise and have fun together as a community, and invite newcomers to take part? Newcomers bring their own gifts to the community and often appreciate being invited to contribute in small or large ways.

25.22 When seekers first discover a welcoming Quaker community, they often have a sense of 'coming home'. Sometimes newcomers wish they had found Quakers much earlier in their lives. By inviting and welcoming seekers, we have an opportunity to share the life-giving experience of the Quaker way with people when they need it most.

25.23 I had a boyfriend in London and one Sunday morning over breakfast he said, 'I'm going to a Quaker meeting, do you want to come?' And so I found myself at Westminster Meeting House, sitting in

this rather solemn, quiet place. But it seemed all right. There were interesting people there, and one or two of them spoke in the meeting. And when we came away my boyfriend said to me, 'What did you make of that, then?' I said, 'Yeah, there's something in that, I might come back to it.' I thought I'd get on with my life and maybe add it on afterwards – and that's exactly what I did, but, alas, some forty-five years later. It was one Christmas Day. I was spending Christmas on my own as I usually do and I thought, 'I'll go along and see what this is all about.' And I went to a Quaker meeting. And I went the next week. And I've gone almost every week since. It convinced me immediately that this was where I needed to be. I was seventy-six.

David, 2018

Part D:

Our Quaker life journeys

Introduction

D.01 We may discover a sense of the Spirit through experiences of belonging or exclusion, of change and self-discovery, in the joy of loving relationships, or in times of loss and grief. Through all the passages of life, the Spirit is present to guide, challenge and comfort us.

As we share our sorrows and joys with each other, we may learn to recognise the Spirit at work in the many ways Friends live the Quaker way, shaped by their different backgrounds and life circumstances. By listening to their life journeys with tender sympathy, we can receive insight, encouragement and consolation from the experience of other Quakers.

D.02 The chapters in this part of the book bring together personal stories and shared reflection by Quaker communities to explore the rich variety of Friends' life experiences.

Chapter 26 – Identity and belonging explores Friends' experiences of self-understanding, difference and belonging. It includes our diverse expressions of gender, sexuality and national identity, and experiences of inequality, power and privilege in society and among Quakers.

Chapter 27 – Love and loss shares Friends' experiences of loving others, and both the joy and suffering that love can bring. It includes experiences of love in committed relationships and families of different kinds, and of grieving for loved ones.

Chapter 28 – Growth and change shares Friends' experiences of different life stages, and reflections on many aspects of change in our lives, including work, technology, ageing, and ending relationships.

Chapter 26:

Identity and belonging

26.01 Perchwch yr amrywiaeth eang sydd yn ein mysg yn ein bywydau a'n cysylltiadau. Gochelwch rhag ffurfio barn ragfarnllyd am deithiau bywyd pobl eraill. A ydych yn meithrin yr ysbryd o gyd-ddyheu ac o faddeuant a fynnir gennym, a ninnau'n ddisgyblion? Cofiwch fod pob un ohonom yn unigryw, yn werthfawr, yn blentyn i Dduw.

Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgments about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.

Advices & queries / *Cynghorion a holiadau* 22, 1994

Introduction

26.02 Our shared identity as Quakers gives us mutual support and collective insight, but our uniqueness is what brings diversity and richness to our community. Finding a sense of belonging within our community and the wider world can help us to accept ourselves and others.

Our differences are an opportunity for mutual learning and inspiration, but they can be a source of pain when we experience rejection or discrimination. Facing up to our own failures can open a way to healing and transformation.

This chapter shares reflections from individual Friends and Quaker communities on their experiences of self-understanding, difference and belonging. It includes:

- Knowing and accepting ourselves
- Belonging and being accepted
- Affirming differences of sexuality and gender
- Power and privilege
- National identity

Knowing and accepting ourselves

26.03 For many of us, knowing ourselves can be difficult, and self-acceptance is a lesson we may need to learn again and again. At times we may need the help of others in this task. A Quaker community can offer a brave space to risk being authentic with each other. In meeting for worship, we may come to know that we are lovable just as we are and to recognise that all are cherished by God. This knowledge can help us to live more authentically and free us to use our gifts fully for the benefit of others.

26.04 We are all, yes, I believe, all a mixture of good and bad, and we are not always good at recognising in this magpie mixture what is bad and what is good. Our need is to accept ourselves as a whole, and offer that whole to God, leaving it to God 'unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid' to evaluate the good and bad in us. The glorious miracle is that, if we can do this, God can still use us, with all our faults and weaknesses, if we are willing to be used.

The knowledge that I am usable, and sometimes used, is to me a source of love and gratitude and strength far deeper even than joy and happiness.

Anna Bidder, 1978

26.05 In this century we have been newly filled by the conscious knowledge of our own darkness – that we carry this darkness within us. We no longer need to project our darkness outward

into demons or scapegoats – or, if we do, we know we are evoking disaster. It is by encounter with our own darkness that we recognise the light. It is the light itself which shows us the darkness – and both are summoned within us.

Lorna M Marsden, 1983

26.06 Each of us is responsible for our own actions and our own reactions. We are not responsible for someone else's actions and reactions. This is very important for women especially because most women have been taught that they are responsible for the happiness of everyone in their family. They are taught that all family unhappiness and discord is their fault. But responsibility rests within each individual.

Alice Wiser, 1985

26.07 When I left school I set out into the world determined that nothing as small as the Society of Friends would hold me. 'I want the real world', I said. 'Friends are good people... They do not drink or smoke or swear, they do not lose their tempers. They do not love money, they do not worship success (well, only a little bit)... they do not fight. They do not do what they want to do... But I am not like that at all. I would like to drink and smoke, to make money, to be successful... I want to please myself, to enjoy myself, to be myself. I am talented and clever and malicious; I will escape, for I am clearly not a Quaker, and find out what it is I am'...

'Father' I said, 'give me my inheritance and I will go out and seek a fortune.' So I took my inheritance and went out and spent it. When it was all gone I came to myself and, finding myself somewhat diminished, faced with demands I found difficult to fulfil, I went to meeting.

'Here I am', I said.

'That's all right.'

'Just for a bit of a sit-down.'

'Whatever you need.'

'You mustn't expect anything from me,' I said, 'I can only bring a need.'

'Whatever you have.'

Dorothy Nimmo, 1979

26.08 Many people experience times of mental and spiritual suffering, when we need the loving support of others to recover a sense of our own worth.

26.09 Many of us have an internal voice which consistently undermines us, constantly telling us that we are unworthy, constantly picking away at our confidence. A great deal of human misery is created by people responding to this inner voice. Sometimes that voice has been placed there by damaging or warping experiences in childhood or adolescence. We can add to the power of that voice, telling ourselves that we never had the right education, the appropriate parenting, or found the life partner we really desired; any one of a number of things which would make us better, more equipped, to face the world. But ultimately this voice is telling us that we are not worthy or lovable as we are. Accessing the loving power at the heart of a meeting for worship can help us into a recognition that this is what Walter Wink describes as the 'voice of the slanderer'... It is not the voice of the Presence which delights in our unbounding glory, that does not wish to see us diminished in any way, and rejoices when we revel in our gifts.

Gerald Hewitson, 2013

26.10 We can get swept away
By what is arising,
Our true Self is lost
When we become part
Of what is arising
From fear, anger, craving.
Our Original Self is poisoned
And we in turn poison the world.

In Presence we become whole again,
Our perspective changes,
Our mind stills,
We can see clearly
What this moment requires
Without any thought of me,
And we can act in a way
That heals and cures
The poisons within us,
And live in harmony
With what love requires of us.

Alex Thomson, 2024

26.11 I had tried to be spiritual and self-sacrificing to the point of absurdity. I had ignored many of my own needs... I had tried to live in my head and my spirit and ignore the rest of my life. I had treated my body and my emotions as if they were unimportant appendages. Plato, and Augustine (and his mum!) had helped me to produce my own private version of hell and it was no wonder that all I had refused to acknowledge in myself had broken out with such savage efficiency...

Sometimes a moment of vision may be a flash-point of discovery, a sudden illumination. Quite often it is a process of becoming aware of what we already know at some deep level in our lives. I recovered my childhood experience of being at home in the universe by a process of picking up clues and beginning to see the real significance of things that had been puzzling to me.

Jo Farrow, 1990

26.12 People like me whose experience of mothering was not 'good enough' struggle always, and I feel sure that the relationship that I have had in my marriage redeemed me. When I got married I didn't believe it could last but it has, and it has got better. It was a bit – looking back – like moving from some bleak, rocky, northern territory to a country where the sun shone. I have been incredibly

affirmed in this relationship and with my children, and have come to acknowledge some things of worth in myself. I do not know where I would have been without this partnership.

But the framework of strength and certainty, which has been so important, is something which I am now experiencing as restrictive. After many years of 'fitting in' to a safe haven, I have become a more challenging and less comfortable person to live with. I have changed and I am committed to more change. My emotional self-sufficiency is being dented and I am finding a stronger sense of self. I feel that I am expanding, breaking out of a carapace, becoming aware of hidden, neglected shadow parts of myself.

This we can say, 1995

26.13 ‹Omitted, text will be renumbered in final edition.›

26.14 It isn't simply where a person has worked, what someone 'did' that defines him or her, although these provide a clue. It is what, and whom, we have loved that defines us, what we have forgiven and what we wish we could have been.

Jeanne Nemec, 1996

See also 2: Quaker spiritual experience.

Belonging and being accepted

26.15 We are all unique and equally precious. God's love is offered to everyone, without exception. Because we are equal before God, every person is worthy of the same respect and care. When we live out this insight in our communities, we nurture relationships grounded in mutual love and respect.

26.16 This week that we spend annually in each other's company is a constructive, joyous occasion where old friendships are rekindled and new ones sparked. Participants often observe that they can truly express themselves, a sentiment we rarely encounter in everyday life. A fellowship grounded in love and mutual acceptance is created which extends beyond the short time here at Conference. This year was no exception.

Senior Conference, 2022

26.17 Where there is genuine tenderness, an openness to responsibility, and the seed of commitment, God is surely not shut out. Can we not say that God can enter any relationship in which there is a measure of selfless love? – and is not every generalisation we make qualified by this?

Towards a Quaker view of sex, 1963

26.18 Breaking out of stereotypes I think is something that should be practised in the Quaker community. We should celebrate everyone's individuality, uphold them for who they are, and not expect them to be like us... Let's sit down with people we don't have things in common with. You don't have to like everyone. Let's not be dismissive because they have a different colour hair. There is a balance to disruption in the community: the community should uphold everyone within it so, in turn, everyone will uphold the community because they feel part of it. It's just talking to people and sharing your experiences and not talking down but building people up, I think.

Matt Moore, 2022

26.19 Knowing, accepting and loving others can be a foundation for lifelong friendships. In true friendships we give and receive care and forgiveness, and these may be some of the most important relationships of our lives.

26.20 There can be no friendship where there is no freedom. Friendship loves a free air, and will not be penned up in straight and narrow enclosures. It will speak freely, and act so too; and take nothing ill, where no ill is meant; nay, where it is, it will easily forgive, and forget too, on small acknowledgements.

A true friend unbosoms freely, advises justly, assists readily, adventures boldly, takes all patiently, defends courageously, and continues a friend unchangeably.

In short, choose a friend as thou dost a wife, till death separate you.

William Penn, 1682

26.21 Friendship should be mutual in the aspect of the contribution of each friend but I'm afraid my contribution to our friendship is very meagre compared to your own. Not only in material things, of course, for there I contribute scarcely anything, but in spiritual values. You have made me what I am, and if I am of any worth it is due to your friendship. And in return – what? Reserved feelings, occasional tempers, ingratitude and in short, absence of any spiritual contribution to our friendship.

Jonah Jones, 1941

26.22 For me, community is about living out a shared story with a shared purpose, and my Quaker communities have allowed me to be a part of their story and to find my own story within it. It is a story of struggle and failing, of joy and delight, of forgiveness and of endless possibility.

I find meaning and purpose in the story of Jesus and his people. Not just Jesus the teacher and not particularly Jesus the miracle-worker,

but Jesus the friend, the companion, the storyteller. Jesus who sits alongside the unlovely, the unworthy, the lonely and the bruised. The Jesus who calls his friends to do the same. It is a story that grants me a way of shaping my intentions and actions, and also a sense of being part of a community that stands beyond time, place and circumstance. A community that lives deeply in both the here and now and in the eternal moment.

But in the end what has given me a continual sense of hope, and has managed to keep joy always somewhere in my peripheral vision throughout this time, has been the small, thoughtful, attentive gifts of kindness that I have both witnessed and received. Those moments where we have paid attention, made space, sat still together, waited alongside each other, checked in, called round, joined in and just taken the time to ask, 'Are you doing okay?'

It is what the writer Frank Cottrell-Boyce describes as the 'stern, joyful discipline of noticing other people'. We do it in worship, we do it in service, we do it quietly, we do it unnoticed. And when we do it, we brush up against what is most precious and most divine in each of us. It is where we meet something of God in each other.

Alistair Fuller, 2021

26.23 Creating a true community, where everyone is included, means seeing beyond differences of background, age or disability, and listening to each person's unique experience.

26.24 Our Religious Society includes a considerable number of people who to some degree live with disabilities, and we generally present quite a good record of considering their needs and attempting to cater for them – a consideration born of our conviction that there is 'that of God' in every person. But we should ask ourselves continually if this consideration is being maintained and whether it goes far enough. If we really mean that there is that of God in everyone, then it behoves us to look

with creative, loving imagination at the condition of every human being. This includes listening to what they say, and the words they choose to say it, and also listening for what they do not or cannot say. It does not mean listening to what someone else says supposedly on their behalf.

Carol Gardiner, 1989

26.25 Having a severe disability in my experience meant almost total isolation from my peers during my teens and early twenties. I could not talk with them or go out with them and this had a drastic effect on my confidence and self-respect. I suffered agonies of repressed sexual longing.

I was lucky. I had the means to recover unavailable to great numbers of young disabled people. As I found vehicles and I could drive my contacts widened and I could exercise my freedom, responsibility and keen intelligence, but it took long years of learning to catch up on normal life...

In some circles... any trivial achievement is regarded with awe and anything approaching normality is quite inconceivable. If I committed some frightful social blunder, they would nod their heads and make irrelevant excuses for me.

Enough of such things. You soon 'forget' them; but deep within you burns a clear impression of profound inferiority; of unacceptability; of a need to apologise for even being the miserable wretch that you are and for needing that minimum of help you dare to require...

All this is a terrible indictment of society but it is not an indictment of the individual. Each of them, including myself, is only echoing the fear and hurt about disability and about their own minds and bodies that they received when they were young. Young children, left alone, will look, enquire, accept, and sometimes even care, without prompting.

Everyone must learn to be glad of what they really are and must feel able to ask for the necessary help to fulfil themselves. We are all in this together, handicapped or not. We all need help to be ourselves.

Jonathan Griffith, 1981

26.26 Living with disability brings such a different perspective. The things people take for granted are difficult, such as simply taking a shower. Chronic disease and illness not only bring an unrelenting range of symptoms but also sap energy and cause fatigue. Medication side effects contribute and expenses rise to run equipment; not all people are eligible for support and it is a daily battle...

Smiling is fraught with danger as [a] common perspective is to judge that happiness is not possible in pain and disability. Invisibly disease creeps on insidiously, wrapped up in a life of fitting in, pushing through and ignorant misunderstanding.

I broke this by realising I am loved, I am enough as I am with no need to disguise. And I found this within me where my God and Light lie always.

Amanda Jones, 2023

26.27 Spending a year living and working in a very different culture immediately after leaving school taught me what it can be like 'not to belong'; but it was interesting to watch the different ways in which the group of young people in the same situation coped with it. There were those who took the decision *not* to belong or assimilate more than was absolutely necessary to a society that was so far removed from the one that they knew, loved and valued; and there were those who, like me, felt we had no choice but to find a way of 'belonging' there. I found it through my work, and realised I could in a sense 'belong' anywhere I had a role to fill, even if that role was the slightly ambiguous one of the 'foreign' (always foreign) teacher. I also realised then how important to me the idea that every person is 'unique, precious and a child of God' had become. It helped to break down gradually the feeling of being

unable to 'belong' anywhere among people whose world-view was so different from my own. If I wanted to resuscitate a worked-to-death George Fox quote, I'd say that in my experience, if we are committed to answering that of God in everyone, we tend to find it; and if we walk cheerfully in that commitment, perhaps we can find the places we belong, anywhere in the world.

Anonymous, Young Friends General Meeting, 1998

26.28 As a young person within the Religious Society of Friends, I have experienced much ageism and tokenism. My involvement in leadership capacities for Quaker organizations has grown in the last several years. I have worked professionally for four different Quaker organizations, and served on countless committees and boards. I find I am often looked to as the voice of young people, almost as a consultant, as one of few, if not the only young person, present. This is tiresome. It doesn't leave much room for me to think or talk about other topics when I am constantly looked to for the youth perspective. I know I'm not alone in this experience. I know of many enthusiastic young Quakers who have been alienated and are tempted to give up on their religious community based on this tokenism and perceived invisibility.

And while I want to help Friends think well about young people, what I really want is for the voices of all young people to be sought, welcomed, and valued. I want a vital, inclusive, multigenerational Religious Society that actually reflects our vision of the Beloved Society we wish to model and realize in the wider world. And of course, that would require a deep examination of all our 'isms', as age is not the only thing that sets us apart.

Sadie Forsythe, 2010

26.29 Much of my struggle with 'that of God in everyone' lies in the intensity of its optimism about humanity and temptation to over-expectation. It seems to encourage us to look only to the good in

the other person even though I know within myself a push to do harm. I know how hard it can be not to give in to those negative feelings. And, when I look around me and see the condition of the world, I wonder how we can be so blindly and naively optimistic.

Yet again and again passages in the Bible admonish us to love our neighbors as ourselves. When asked 'who is my neighbor?' Jesus responds with the story of the good Samaritan, a story where all the pious and proper folk ignore the beaten man lying by the side of the road and the despised Samaritan shows mercy. This parable, like so many other stories around Jesus, breaks apart people's assumptions based on nationality, religion and other such boundaries. Just as Jesus reached out to the tax collectors and prostitutes, we are to engage even the most unlike folk with hope.

These words, and my heart, push me to break free of cynicism and prejudice. I am pushed to treat each individual with respect even when I do not understand his culture, or when my culture warns me of danger or says he is unworthy. I am pushed to change institutions and laws which treat any human being as less than another. There is no room for doing otherwise. Affirming that of God in all people is a powerful force.

Margery Post Abbott, 2010

26.30 You Say You Love Me (God's Lament)

You say you love Me
But you walk on by
When I'm cold and hungry
And I cry out for your help.
You say you love Me
But your neighbour starves
Needlessly
Because you do not share.
You say you love Me

And yet you destroy
The world that I gave you
To tend.
You say you love Me
But you kill one another
And worse
You do it in My name.
You say I am the Way
But my Way you do not follow.
You say I am the Truth
But Truth you do not hear.
You say I am loving
And still you imagine
I would send you to hell
For believing 'wrong' things.
One day
You will realise
What it truly means
To love.

Peter Parr, 2010

26.31 We all have a need for belonging. In an inclusive and accepting Quaker community, we may find we are loved for who we are, and we can belong without having to fit in:

> Why, I ask myself, did I go to worship with those rather small and not very distinguished groups of people? Surely it was that sitting among these quite ordinary people, to most of whom I remained a stranger and a foreigner for some months, I sensed an experience of belonging – of community. A true Friends' meeting for worship drawing individuals with varieties of temperament, talent and background always manages to engender a climate of belonging, of community which is infectious and creative. This experience of 'belonging' has remained with me over the years and it has grown both in intensity and universality... The 'giving out'

of such a sense of community is the natural witness of a Quaker meeting which has in it the seed of life and creative experience.

Ranjit M Chetsingh, 1967

26.32 This is part of the introduction to the consideration of gender diversity at Britain Yearly Meeting in 2021:

> We all want to belong. Belonging is a vital need for all human beings. We want to know that we are an important member of the group. Not belonging can feel awkward, it hurts, and it is alienating... Belonging is not about fitting in, it is about being accepted as oneself. There is a big difference between belonging and fitting in. Fitting in is having to be like everyone else. I have to be like you to fit in. I get to be me if I belong.

Siobhán Haire, 2021

Affirming differences of sexuality and gender

26.33 We are embodied beings, and our experience of sexuality can be a revelation of the sacredness of all life. As a Quaker community, we seek to welcome and learn from our differences of gender and sexuality.

26.34 In the journey through life, as we grow and mature, live singly or in a relationship with others our sexuality will grow, develop and change. Our sexual needs, drives and fantasies will be different at different stages in our life – as a teenager, a partner, a parent, an older person. Our sexuality is, throughout, an expression of ourselves. It is an integral part of our humanity and as such is subject to the leadings of the spirit. We should therefore give thanks for our sexuality and seek to nurture it both within ourselves and in our loving relationships.

Bill Edgar, 1994

26.35 Sexuality is itself a gift of God. We acknowledge and celebrate the glory of sexuality: we must not forget the dark side. The openness to and acceptance of the other that can be at the heart of sexual relationships mean that rejection and damage can be great when we fail. When we are close to meeting that of God in others, the opportunity for sin may not be far away. However, the right exercise of our sexuality has various expressions. We need to accept this variety as part of the diversity of creation.

This we can say, 1995

26.36 We affirm the love of God for all people, whatever their sexual orientation, and our conviction that sexuality is an important part of human beings as created by God, so that to reject people on the grounds of their sexual [orientation] is a denial of God's creation... We realise that our sexual nature can be a cause of great pain as well as great joy. It is up to each one of us to recognise this pain... to reach out to others as best we can, and to reflect on our own shortcomings in loving others... We need to overcome our fear of what is strange or different, because we are all vulnerable; we all need love.

Wandsworth Preparative Meeting, 1989

26.37 God's love is ministered to most people through the love of our fellow human beings. Sometimes that love is expressed physically or sexually. For me and my lover John, God's love is given through our homosexual relationship...

We both draw on our love a great deal to give us the strength and courage to do the things to which God calls us... Our spiritual journey is a shared one. Sometimes the pitcher needs to be taken back to the fountain. In order to grow, I need my church to bless and uphold not just me as an individual, but also our relationship.

Gordon Macphail, 1989

26.38 I lost my faith as a young teenager. I'd met someone in my religious Guides group. We loved one another quietly, in the stillness of the church vestry, and I thought maybe I had finally found the divine. That was until we were found out by the other girls, and she blamed it all on me 'leading her astray'. I left, and my faith in the church followed soon after...

I won't pretend Quakers are perfect when it comes to LBGT+ rights, but finding community with people who never thought I was lesser for my sexuality or gender nonconformity gave me time to heal, and to think back on my time in the church. Many LGBT+ Christians have had to take time away to make peace with the fact that we were raised being told we were sinners, when in reality, the divine loves us for our queerness, not in spite of it.

Being a genderqueer lesbian has taught me how to stand up for those who religion has hurt. It has taught me to question what I'm taught, protect those who are cast out, and not to shirk my responsibility in doing so. Meanwhile, being a Quaker has taught me that although faith can be used as a weapon, it can also be a tool to make space for everyone. With it, I can stand up for my queer siblings, work to recognise my privilege, and love the downtroddens. Bringing these two worlds together has taught me a simple message: it is vital to show true, unconditional love through both your words and your deeds. And we have a duty to do so.

A D Wilson, 2024

26.39 I take a very tender part of myself and relax it completely. I find that I am able to surrender to something larger than just me. There are many different and amazing feelings and lots of sensation. It can become very exciting and exhausting. It concludes, I experience separation, and it's just me again. I try to understand everything that's happened. Now, my query to you is: am I describing surrender to the Holy Spirit in meeting for worship – or am I describing lovemaking? It might be that they are remarkably similar.

John Calvi, 2004

26.40 I think my upbringing around sex, it was quite shadowy, [sex] was... something sinful... my body as a woman was something that I learned wasn't mine, and this was quite a weird thing... It was just this sense that... your body was really there as decoration or titillation for men.

But what I kept coming up with again and again, was that I was having these [sexual] experiences that were transcendent, mystical, mind-blowing if you like, and I felt like they were healing me on a really deep level... it felt like I was going on this sex journey and it was like the universe was saying 'oh my God what took you so long?!' And I was really being held... by Spirit in a really beautiful way... just learning about... the pleasure I was capable of, but it felt... so exquisite and powerful.

Lucy-Anne Holmes, 2020

26.41 By affirming the goodness of human sexuality, in all its rich diversity, I am fighting for my wholeness: for all of my identities, desires, and connections to be present in the room, all at once, in dignity and safety. I am fighting for your wholeness. I am fighting for our ability to connect authentically. I am reaching for a place where we know more because we have heard each other's stories, where we begin to grasp the full truth by sharing the parts of it we can each see from where we are.

Having sex like a Quaker – pursuing a grounded, loving, progressive, and life-affirming approach to human sexuality – is an act not just of seeking wholeness but of staking out ground and fighting for our wholeness actively and passionately. We need to do this if we are going to resist the machinery of shame, the hierarchy of human worth. These will try to erode and erase our wholeness. But they will not win. We can't let them.

Kody Gabriel Hersh, 2016

26.42 ‹Omitted, text will be renumbered in final edition.›

26.43 Quakers in North East Thames Area Meeting are aware that our community is a continuing creation in which we seek to know and love ourselves and one another in all our differences, united at a profound level in our efforts to reach and respond to others in the things that are eternal.

We want our Local Meetings to be safe places where each person can come as their own true self and find a spiritual home.

We recognise that there is a growing awareness in society, and in the Society of Friends, that the terms 'man' and 'woman' prove incomplete when describing the diversity of gender identity and experience that exists.

We hope that we can all grow together in our understanding of gender identity.

We want it to be known that our Area Meeting is a place where all are welcomed and nurtured, including people who are transgender and non-binary.

We hope that we can share a spiritual companionship, creating a place where we can all listen to and connect with one another, and accompany one another with love.

North East Thames Area Meeting, 2017

26.44 Fred is a transgender man; Emma is a lesbian with gender-critical beliefs. We have some experiences in common around gender non-conformity and dysphoria but, in a very polarised topic, we find ourselves on different sides of a big divide. Last year, following discussion in a Quaker Facebook group, we exchanged some messages and agreed to meet in a video call. Our intention was (and is) to talk about the sex and gender issues that concern us in a loving and trusting space.

It was a leap of faith for both of us to come into this dialogue: we've both had very difficult encounters with people from 'the other side'. One thing we share is that, for both of us, being Quaker is absolutely at the core of our selves. This is the common ground on which we meet.

Alongside its widely shared welcome statement, there is a bit of Minute 31 of Yearly Meeting 2021 that speaks to both of us: 'We recognise that we need to keep listening and searching together. In an atmosphere of trust, we need to listen, to share our journeys, in silent worship, and in prayer.'

Fred Langridge and Emma Roberts, 2024

For more on Minute 31, see 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities.

26.45 Some Friends go through profound transitions that can be both painful and deeply healing. These journeys often lead to a fuller

understanding of ourselves and a more authentic expression of who we are. When we respect and celebrate the wide diversity among us, we honour the presence of God within each person.

26.46 'Coming Out' (of the closet) is that brave moment of making our identity known in spite of expected hostility or disapproval. It is about breathing in and taking the plunge, of being true to oneself and more honest to everyone else, of being public about what has been private, of taking the next step to self-acceptance and our best self. It is about living into our life more fully as the precious child of God we have been created to be.

I first came out as gay in my teenage years. It was not pleasant and one friend was physically sick on hearing the news. But that was not the end: I have found 'coming out' to be a continual process. I needed to come out to my lesbian and gay friends, with equal anxiety, as bisexual. Later I needed to tell revolutionary comrades that I was leaving the cause and taking a job. I needed to tell atheist friends that I had become a Quaker. And so it has continued.

Each new stage of life has involved 'coming out' and given my context, my community at the time, it has not been easy to publicly own a new identity. At the same time, each is part of my journey, in some ways one after the other but also all together. Each identity is an element of my spiritual self, part of my ministry, and a use of my gifts for God's loving purposes. We are all always becoming. I hope that every coming out can be met with love and celebration, and that we can all continue to be open to whoever we are next led to be.

Ben Pink Dandelion, 2024

26.47 I have decided to share my own story, as a mother who has had the privilege of accompanying a son through transition...

Ours is a journey that started over twenty years ago, in what I now realise were kinder times... The journey we embarked on... has been

a process of transformation and life-affirming growth for all of us who took part in it. Like all birth experiences, it came with a great deal of pain beforehand, but it was purposeful pain, which enabled life to flow more abundantly. The transition process itself felt like a liberation and brought healing.

For me, it was also a deeply spiritual experience, one where I had to let go of what I thought I knew and my hopes and expectations, and let G-d guide me.

Being part of a Quaker community that supported us without question was a huge encouragement and made a great difference to our ability to navigate the early parts of the journey, after very turbulent teenage years. We experienced that 'welcome and affirmation' that Minute 31 of Britain Yearly Meeting 2021 later promised and will be forever grateful for it. Friends did not need to 'understand', they just loved and accepted us...

My two sons are just my sons to me... I am proud of their achievements and thankful that they are honest and kind people. All I wish them is good health and happiness. All I want from my Quaker community is to treat them equally, be welcoming of them, take an interest in their lives and in the people they are. Nothing to see here, or to understand. Just two (almost middle-aged) men, each unique and special in his own way.

Anonymous, 2025

26.48 The discovery or realisation of a new sexual identity or orientation can be a time of exhilaration and celebration for the person concerned, and those close to them. At the same time it can bring grief and devastation for their partner. It has taken me more than 20 years after my husband told me he was gay to bring myself to write this. He said he had discovered that he was gay. I have learned how human sexuality grows and develops over time. It is a gift: a source of joy, wonder and ecstasy; and also of turmoil, confusion, pain and hurt.

When my husband made his revelation to me one term-time Sunday night, with our three adolescent sons recently gone to bed, I felt my life's fabric literally falling apart... Gradually, with hindsight and talking things through I realised how many clues I had missed and/or denied over the years. That Sunday evening, I was in love with this man passionately. I admired and respected him for his deeply held values of equality, peacemaking and truthfulness. This man was being truthful to me now about who he had discovered himself to be, and was sharing it with me in the hope that I would celebrate with him. He had already been talking to a small number of gay Quaker friends who supported him. I felt disorientated, lost, numb, without words, in an agony of confusion and bereavement, tears, and loss of self-confidence. If he was not bisexual, then what [had] all those years of apparently mutual sexual discovery and satisfaction and loyalty been about? I couldn't sleep, I went to work in a daze. I struggled but could not find the words to tell even my best friends for days.

Jenny Amery, 2020

26.49 While many Quaker couples are monogamous, this is not always the case. In the following extracts, some Friends write about their own experience of polyamorous relationships.

26.50 I see no reason why me and my loved ones should pretend that we are only capable of loving one person. The nature of love is beyond me and outside of my control, but I can choose how to act on it. To act ethically on the feeling of love, to me, is to be honest about who I love, and to share the feeling whenever I can.

Together as a group we love each other dearly and I am delighted to be a part of these wonderful people's lives. They are all the light of my life.

Is love not supposed to be infinite?

Robin Janet Young, 2024

26.51 Being able to share your love with another person is, in my opinion, one of the most beautiful and important things one can do with their life. We don't assume there to be a limit on platonic or familial love, you don't love your individual friends less because you love the others, a parent doesn't love their child less because they have multiple. Placing a presumed limit on romantic love is a needless restriction on our capacity to love and appreciate each other. The love I feel for my partner and the love she feels for me is beautiful and passionate. That passion and beauty is not lost or reduced as a result of her expressing that same intensity of love for her other partners.

Josephine Mary Elspeth MacConnell, 2024

26.52 In the following passages, Friends write about their experiences of singleness and how it has informed their sense of self and belonging.

26.53 Many of us, widows or widowers, divorced or separated, homosexual and heterosexual, bachelors and spinsters, will be living alone for at least part of our lives. Some may still be grieving over the loss of a loved one, and whether that loss is caused by death or by separation, the need may be to have time in which to rediscover oneself as a single yet whole person, with needs and strengths, potentialities and achievements. Another may be enjoying freedom from commitment to another, but feel guilty about being self-centred. Yet others may be perplexed, even tormented, by their sexual drives and fantasies, and may be seeking ways of sublimation. Some may still feel the wounds of an earlier broken relationship and fear to take further risks, or may have experienced at one remove the tensions and hurts of an unhappy marriage. Some may have doubts about their own capacity to give happiness to a married partner or may have romantic ideas of finding the perfect partner, while yet others do not know why, without making any conscious choice, they have remained single. But underlying all these differences there is the common need to love and be loved.

Some Westminster Friends, 1990

26.54 I was single until I was 36. It was all too easy to fall for the claims that people in committed relationships are more psychologically mature than those of us living without a partner. Even in some Quaker writings, I've seen self-centredness hinted at in descriptions of living alone. The result of this interpretation was that I set about proving how mature and selfless I could be. Looking back, I'm glad of the work I did for causes I believed in, but I'm sorry for that part of my motivation. It was wonderful when a perceptive friend pointed out that I kept taking on obligations 'to apologise for having partner-free, child-free time'.

I began to embrace my singleness without fear of appearing selfish, odd, unchosen. I realised this was the life that I had chosen, in a series of conscious or unconscious decisions, because it suited me.

So I was able to laugh when an acquaintance greeted the news of my newly-partnered state with the words: 'It's nice to have someone to care for, isn't it?' As if I'd cared for nobody before! In that one sentence, she dismissed intimate friendship, extended family, good-neighbourliness, passionate social action, and spiritual and personal development. A full life can be deemed empty if one is not caring for one's own partner or family.

When I compare myself then and now, I know that I'm much more selfish in my partnered state than I ever was when single. My partner can be my excuse for all sorts of laziness and insularity, which people are happy to make allowances for. I even give more selfishly – in the sense that I get back all I give and more. This newer life is far more self-indulgent than the old – and respected more by society.

This we can say, 2003

26.55 Singleness is a state in which many of us find ourselves... Some of us choose, for various reasons to remain single – an absorbing career perhaps or the care of others which we feel demands all we have

to give and in which we find fulfilment. We all need to love and be loved and for some of us this need is met, and can be met, in all sorts of nourishing ways...

For others of us though, this way would not be of our choosing and sometimes the path we tread is hard, barren and stony. There is for us an ache inside which does not go away. We long to be someone's nearest and dearest. We would like to have demands made upon us, to be needed, to be important for someone else's happiness and well-being. For some of us celibacy is a hard road – we long to be touched, caressed and for sexual union. What, we wonder, are we to do with the gift of our sexuality? In today's society we confuse sexuality with sex and fall into the trap of thinking we must have a sexual partner in order to express our sexuality. This is not true. Our sexuality belongs to us and there are many ways of expressing and taking delight in it.

We may fall into another trap – that of imagining that life with a partner is all bliss! Our partnered Friends will soon put us right on this, whilst rejoicing in all the good a happy partnership can bring.

All of us, partnered or single, need to feel that we belong, that we are valued and included – we need affirmation and recognition of who and what we are – we need, in our meeting especially, to make sure that this happens.

Jennifer Johnson, 1990

26.56 ‹Omitted, text will be renumbered in final edition.›

26.57 What is essential for the authentic life lies within ourselves, and we reach it through the power of that Spirit in which we live and move and have our being. It is important for us to find ways to use this power, through prayer, reading, meditation, journal-keeping, and spiritual paths.

Friends who are single, whether by choice or by chance, whether never married, or separated, divorced or widowed bear a particular witness to the conviction that the individual and each one's spiritual journey is the essential unit of the Society of Friends.

New England Yearly Meeting, 2001

Power and privilege

26.58 Inequalities of power and privilege exist within the Quaker community as well as in the wider world. Recognising and responding to God in each person can open our eyes to historical and continuing injustice, and the possibility of healing and transforming our relationships.

26.59 We are all the poorer for the crushing of one man, since the dimming of the Light anywhere darkens us all.

Michael Sorensen, 1986

26.60 Guided by the Light of God within us and recognising that of God in others, we can all learn to value our differences in age, sex, physique, race and culture. This enables mutual respect and self-respect to develop, and it becomes possible for everyone to love one another as God loves us. Throughout our lives, we see ourselves reflected in the facial expressions, verbal comments and body-language of others. We have a responsibility to protect each other's self-respect.

Because of their commitment to social concerns, some Quakers

may find it inconceivable that they may lack understanding of issues involving racism. Jesus stressed the unique nature and worth of each individual. It is unreasonable to expect assimilation or to ignore difference, claiming to treat everyone the same. This denies the value of variety, which presents not a problem, but a creative challenge to live adventurously.

Personality, sex, race, culture and experience are God's gifts. We need one another and differences shared become enrichments, not reasons to be afraid, to dominate or condemn. The media have increased our knowledge of the world, but we need greater self-awareness if our actions are to be changed in relation to the information we receive. We need to consider our behaviour carefully, heeding the command of Jesus that we should love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

Meg Maslin, 1990

26.61 As Quakers, we seek to find that of God in everyone. Because of our understanding of humanity as equal parts of a sacred whole, we feel the injustices of the world keenly, and seek change. The Quaker faith invites us to speak truth to power in love and challenge those who treat people badly. But we all live within an unfair system, and it's easy to overlook exclusion and the impact of power dynamics in our own events and lives. Unless we challenge ourselves, we risk replicating injustice by default. That's because some inequalities have become normal – we've adapted to them, making them hard to 'see'. And yet inequality is a human problem with human solutions. To make equality a reality, we must choose different ways of being.

The concept of privilege – and the power that comes with it – has become a hot topic in recent years. It describes something important, making it a sensitive subject that requires care. Discussions of power and privilege often touch upon inequalities that divide us, at a personal as well as a social level. This includes differences in class, income, education, race and ethnic identity,

gender, sexuality, age, the spectrum of disability, and personal wellbeing. When inequalities are explored and addressed, however, we can become stronger, more loving communities, and better equipped to do the work of social change.

Suki Ferguson, 2018

26.62 Discrimination... may occur, and feelings may be hurt, by unthinking assumptions and lack of sensitivity. Being a Friend does not confer automatic protection against this, either as giver or receiver.

Meeting for Sufferings, 1988

26.63 We recognise the exclusion we may create is not intentional but it doesn't mean we aren't responsible for it. There is a feeling [that] Quakers are passively inclusive. Our testimony to equality makes us complacent.

Junior Yearly Meeting, 2019

26.64 We are a community of Quakers of many backgrounds and racialised experiences. We acknowledge the racialised privilege of many among us, and we value the breadth of experiences and identities among us. Our continued self-examination, discomfort, conviction and commitment is needed.

It is uncomfortable to face the truth, but in our hearts it is a truth we know already. Moving personal testimony in our Yearly Meeting sessions, from Friends who have been subject to racism, confirms this: just as our Quaker forebears were sometimes on the wrong side of history, so we all are complicit in systems of oppression today, including exploitative labour practices in the creation of the technology that enables this blended Yearly Meeting, and in the clothes that we wear. We must acknowledge our complicity in order to begin the work of dismantling those systems.

Britain Yearly Meeting, 2022

26.65 Many of us were saddened and ashamed to hear personal experiences of racism: descriptions of an event where none of the bystanders on the street supported the Friend, and another within the context of service on a Quaker central committee. A necessary first step against oppression is to believe one another's accounts and experiences.

We were given powerful evidence of Quaker engagement in the transatlantic slave trade. It is important to understand and tell the truth about the past – it is even more important to recognise its enduring consequences: the trauma and impact on lives in the present.

We must start making changes now and for the future: "planting flowers as well as pulling up weeds." Britain Yearly Meeting resolves... to look at ways to make meaningful reparations for our failings. We need to take urgent action as individuals, in our local, area and yearly meetings.

"What do love and justice require of us?"

Britain Yearly Meeting, 2022

For more on how Quakers approach questions of power and privilege, see 2: Quaker spiritual experience, 6: The meaning of Quaker community and 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities.

National identity

26.66 Britain Yearly Meeting includes the nations of Scotland, Wales and England (Quakers in Northern Ireland are part of Ireland Yearly Meeting) as well as the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The diversity of geography, history, language, and culture across our nations and islands adds richness to our Quaker community:

Scotland is a small country, not a region in northern Britain. Through our Scottish Parliament, we have control over much of what happens in Scotland and we have access to our decision makers.

Historically, we have had a strong Presbyterian culture but Scottish culture is not fixed in the past, it grows and changes with the times.

Elizabeth Allen, 2026

26.67 Bronwen Currie was part of a large city meeting in the east of Scotland for 25 years before moving to the island of Islay, in the southern Hebrides:

Overnight I became a Hebridean Friend. Within a few weeks of arriving I took myself off to my nearest meeting in mainland Argyll. The journey involved around 25 miles by road each way, plus a 2-hour ferry journey. Ferries are the joy and challenge of island-living, but this did mean a 13-hour round trip to go to meeting and I only did it once a month. Very soon I found a couple of interested enquirers in Islay, [the] Islay & Jura Meeting was born, and I experienced the joy (and challenges!) of worshipping in a very small Meeting where you get to know everyone at a deeper level than is possible in a large – and sometimes transient – meeting.

So began a pattern that is common to most Friends living in Highland and island Scotland – a smallish local meeting that may not manage to meet every week, combined with very long distances, frequently involving an overnight, to meet with other Friends for meeting for worship for business, trustees and so on.

All this changed with Covid. One of the few good things that emerged from the pandemic was the use of video-conferencing. No longer did it take me three days to attend area meeting or trustees in Glasgow. Blended meetings became the norm for both worship and business, and we found joy in joining with Friends from across Scotland – and further afield. The worship is different from 'in-the-room' worship, but for many of us it can still be deeply gathered and a very good second-best. It is this practice of online meeting which I believe has made possible the move to a single charity which enables us to gather and work together as one family of Scottish Friends.

Bronwen Currie, 2026

26.68 Rhian Parry reflects on her experience as a Welsh speaker attending meeting for worship:

Tylwyth

Dof i'r addoliad yn gwisgo fy ngeiriau Cymraeg. Dof wedi ymwisgo yng ngeiriau coeth a dywediadau Beibl William Morgan 1588. Y geiriau hyn a gynhaliodd Ysgolion Sul Cymru ac a warchododd ein hiaith drwy addoliad. Cymharol ychydig newidiodd yn yr eirfa, gramadeg a chystrawen, fel gallwn ei ddeall yn rhwydd heddiw. Maent yn cydio ynof mor gyfforddus â litwrgi'r Offeren Ladin neu lafarganu Bwdhaidd. Magwyd ein Cyfeillion cynnar yng Nghymru ar y geiriau rhwng cloriau'r Beibl hwn. Teimlaf yn rhan o'u profiad a rhannaf eu hiaith ysbrydol genedlaethol a'u dehongliad o gred.

Heddiw, yn 2005, mae gennym destunau mwy diweddar Cymraeg gan Grynwyr ar gyfer addoliad a thrafodaeth. Mae *Cynghorion a holiadau* yn hoff lyfryn poced sy'n cael ei drysori a'i fyseddu'n helaeth. Er bod angen ei ddiweddaru i'w wneud yn fwy hygyrch heddiw, mae'n rhy werthfawr i'w golli. Daeth ei eiriau a'i syniadau yn litwrgi mor gyfarwydd i ni â Beibl 1588. Drwy ein haddoliad cymunedol cysylltir ni â'n Cyfeillion cynnar, a fudodd i Pennsylvania. Cydio wnawn mewn geiriau cyffredin.

Familia

I come to worship wearing my Welsh words. I come already clothed in the words and language of William Morgan's Bible of 1588, words which subsequently sustained Welsh Sunday Schools and preserved our language through worship. Its vocabulary, grammar and syntax have changed relatively little and the text is easily understood today. It engages me much like the familiar liturgy of the Latin Mass or Buddhist chants. Our early Quakers in Wales were brought up on this Bible. I feel part of their experience and share their spiritual national language and interpretations of belief.

Today, in 2025, we have more recent Welsh Quaker texts for worship and discussion. *Cynghorion a holiadau* [the Welsh version of *Advices & queries*], a much thumbed pocket book, is particularly revered. Although in need of updating to be made more accessible, it is still to be cherished. We have become familiar with its liturgical thoughts and language, as we have with the Bible of 1588. These guide our shared worship, linking us to our early Friends, who emigrated to Pennsylvania. We hold on to the familiar words.

Rhian Parry, 2025

Chapter 27:

Love and loss

27.01 Love is the hardest lesson in Christianity; but, for that reason, it should be most our care to learn it.

William Penn, 1693

Introduction

27.02 In loving relationships with family members, friends and partners, we can find great joy and terrible loss. Through passionate love or in selfless care for friends and strangers, we may become more tender and receptive to the Light Within. When we love, we also open ourselves to the risk of loss and suffering.

As Quakers, we aim to nurture and celebrate relationships that embody mutual love and respect. We also recognise the pain that is caused when we fall short in caring for each other.

This chapter shares Friends' experiences of loving others, and both the joy and suffering that love can bring. It includes:

- Love
- Expressions of love in relationships
- Being part of a family
- Loss and grief

Love

27.03 We can share love with those closest to us, and sometimes with strangers in unexpected ways. We may fall short in our care for others, but love is a practice we can return to again and again.

The quotations in this section explore the many ways we give and receive love.

27.04 Loving doesn't only mean doing good works; it goes further than feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. It means warmth and intimacy, open-heartedness and overwhelming generosity of hand and spirit. It means a desire to know and a courageous willingness to be known.

Loving implies commitment to the other person [and] involvement in that person's life whatever it may cost in suffering, whether that suffering comes through being repudiated or through identification and sharing.

Towards a Quaker view of sex, 1963

27.05 We gathered in York for a weekend of friendship and hope. This weekend, everyone seemed to arrive with their arms open to each other, and we were reminded once again of the power of a space in which trust is easily given and love everywhere to be found; but we have also been shown something of its vulnerability and the constant work of care that is required to sustain it.

Sometimes love is doing the washing-up.

Young Friends General Meeting, 2020

27.06 During a time of conflict between colonial settlers and Indigenous people, the American Quaker John Woolman was led to visit a Native American community:

> Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life, and the Spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of Truth amongst them. And as it pleased the Lord to make way for my going at a time when the troubles of war were increasing and when by reason of much wet weather travelling was more difficult than usual at that season, I looked upon it as a more favourable opportunity to season my mind, and bring me into a nearer sympathy with them. And as mine eye was to the great Father of Mercies, humbly desiring to learn what his will was concerning me, I was made quiet and content.
>
> John Woolman, 1763

27.07 At the age of 16, William Caton, an early member of the Swarthmoor household, wrote of the love that enfolded all who became part of Margaret Fell's home:

> Truly willing we were to sympathise and bear one with another, to be helpful one unto another, and in true and tender love to watch over one another. And, oh the love, mercy and power of God, which abounded to us, through us and among us; who shall declare it? And hence came that worthy family to be so renowned in the nation, the fame of which spread much among Friends. And the power and presence of the Lord being so much there with us, it was as a means to induce many, even from far, to come thither, so that at one time there would have been Friends out of five or six counties... I was cherished and encouraged in the way of life by my entirely beloved friend Margaret Fell, who as a tender-hearted nursing-mother cared for me and was tender of me as if I had been one of her own children; oh, the kindness, the respect and friendship which she showed me ought never to be forgotten by me.
>
> William Caton, 1689

27.08 Sometimes it can be difficult to love. It may take persistence and practice, or we may discover expressions of love in unexpected ways.

27.09 We are called to obedient love even though we may not be feeling very loving. Often it is through the performance of loving acts that loving feelings can be built up in us. We may start with small, perhaps very tiny steps. It is only as we begin to allow Christ's love to act in and through us that it can become a part of us.

Sandra Cronk, 1983

27.10 I came to realise that the best way to deepen my love of God was to use my experience of the love in my everyday life in all its variety, subtlety and uncertainty. Getting on with those I love is often a business demanding patience, discretion, tact and understanding. It gets complicated sometimes. It also gets strained, occasionally to the breaking point. But without expression it is barren. I show my love in the things I do, and I also show it by words of endearment. These things are all part and parcel of one another. This is what worship should be like. This is the idiom in which we should speak to God.

John Punshon, 1987

27.11 'I was worried about having to become a carer,' said the Friend, 'but actually it's easy when you love someone.' It was like a knife to my heart, as I was finding it very difficult. Did it mean that I didn't love my husband?

'Of course, you're not a natural carer,' said a friend, when I admitted to my struggles. What does that mean? What does that say about me?

The physical caring was not too problematic, but this combined with his angry depression that took whatever I did for granted meant that things became more difficult. Our relationship

changed – physically, emotionally, intellectually, sexually. At my Quaker marriage I had made a promise 'with God's help'. Without the support of Friends and friends, and [John] Woolman's safe habitation of prayer I don't know how I would have kept going. I longed for direct experience of God helping me but I can see now that it was almost entirely mediated to me through others.

Very occasionally though, in the depths of despair, my eyes were opened and I saw my husband through the eyes of God, and I was filled with compassion for him. I saw in truth what he had lost and I saw his awareness of the man he had been. And I understood how hard it was for him. And I felt the warmth of love again. And once when I saw him with God's eyes I felt that compassion encompassing me, too.

Anonymous, 2024

27.12 The best experience I know of loving care from a total stranger is our family encounter with Peppa Pig Man. We were traveling by train from Birmingham to Glasgow, when our daughter was violently sick. The train was hot, fast and crowded. There was only so much we could do to help her feel better. A stranger asked what was her name, where was she going, and did she like Peppa Pig? What was her favourite episode? His was *A trip to the Moon* and he had three little boys at home who loved it too. We watched several episodes on his phone until the train pulled into Central Station. We don't know his name, or why he was traveling to Glasgow. He may well have forgotten us by now. But we remember his help and gentleness.

Nuala Watt, 2024

27.13 Piano

Like having a piano in the house
We all need someone on whom to practice
Love. Arpeggios of passion, chords of content.

Persistent scales of care, with sharps or flats.
Not necessarily the great concert
Of long-established wedded partnership –

Short practice pieces, over telephones,
To solitary friends; quick suburban trills
In shopping mall or high street;

Cadenzas in airmail envelopes
For dears Down Under.
But practise, practise. That's the thing:

Beethoven sonatas can't be achieved
In a week. Unpractised fingers of love
Won't be sure or supple enough

When a concert performance is urgently needed
For child, father, friend, neighbour,
Stranger, enemy.

Rosie Bailey, 2014

27.14 One of the unexpected things I have learnt in my life as a Quaker is that religion is basically about relationships between people. This was an unexpected discovery, because I had been brought up to believe that religion was essentially about our relationship with God.

If we are sensitive, we find that everything that happens to us, good or bad, can help us to build a vision of the meaning of life. We can be helped to be sensitive by reading the Bible and being open to experience of nature, music, books, painting, sport or whatever our particular interest may be. It is in and through all things that we hear God speaking to us. But I do not think I am alone in my certainty that it's in my relationships with people that the deepest religious truths are most vividly disclosed.

George Gorman, 1982

27.15 To release our love into the world we must first fill the jug from which we pour: love and care for ourselves fundamentally enables us to love others. From a position of self-acceptance, we find the capacity to connect with the light in others. This returns us to our innately loving state. Such relationships are the birthplace of universal compassion.

Over the course of the event, we have held in our minds those experiencing hate and wish for a peaceful world with the belonging we have felt here. We believe love is an action. Ultimately, this gives us our instruction: to nurture love and find that of God within us all.

Junior Yearly Meeting, 2024

27.16 'A dog is an instrument of grace' (source unknown). My companion animal, Rosie, helps me to live the life of the Spirit. She is my dog, as I am her human. When I call her, she comes running, gladly.

She helps me to focus on the moment. Her world is vividly present to her: 'what a dog is looking at, a dog is thinking about'. As she takes time to examine the smells in a tuft of grass or a paving stone, I have learned to lift myself out of my irritation at having to pause (when I have so many important things to do, I think) and to look around at my world and to have a moment of silence to touch the God within. And when I sit to have times of quiet worship, she joins me, circling carefully on my lap to become a neat roundness of sleeping dog; and I, too, circle in spirit, to settle quietly and gently into stillness and awareness of the divine. I look at her and remember the words of Jesus: 'every hair of your head is counted' and remember that the love that I have for her is like the love God has for me.

Sheila Semple, 2024

Expressions of love in relationships

27.17 Some relationships are based on long-term commitment. As a friend, lover or spouse, many of us seek to find, build and maintain enduring love with another person.

The quotations in this section explore both the challenges and the gifts of committed relationships, whether platonic or sexual.

27.18 Atlas

There is a kind of love called maintenance,
Which stores the WD40 and knows when to use it;
Which checks the insurance, and doesn't forget
The milkman; which remembers to plant bulbs;
Which answers letters; which knows the way
The money goes; which deals with dentists
And Road Fund Tax and meeting trains,
And postcards to the lonely; which upholds
The permanently rickety elaborate
Structures of living, which is Atlas.
And maintenance is the sensible side of love,
Which knows what time and weather are doing
To my brickwork; insulates my faulty wiring;
Laughs at my dryrotten jokes; remembers
My need for gloss and grouting; which keeps
My suspect edifice upright in air,
As Atlas did the sky.

U A Fanthorpe, 1995

27.19 William Penn's advice 'Never marry but for love; but see that thou lovest what is lovely' sets out the guiding principle for choosing a life partner. There is much hard work involved in creating and working at a long-term relationship.

To choose as a life partner one who shares your interests and

enthusiasms, who makes a good friend as well as a good lover – whose personality and freedom you respect, who shares the belief that marriage is a religious act, and that the love that unites man and woman is part of the great love of God – these are some of the foundation stones of a happy marriage.

Ruth I Midgley, 1950

27.20 The eighteenth-century Friend John Conran described meeting his future wife, Louisa Strongman:

I felt in silence, a strong draft of love more than natural, and a secret intimation impressed my mind that she would be my wife; this I hid in my heart, and it was nearly two years before I felt at liberty to disclose it to any one, waiting as I apprehend the Lord's time to communicate it... and when I felt the way open to proceed in it at that time, it was nearly six years after this before we were married.

John Conran, Published 1850

27.21 Sarah Grubb wrote to her children in 1832:

In the year 1803 I was united in marriage to your dear father... Oh I have no doubt, not the least, that Divine Wisdom pointed out the suitableness and propriety of our becoming each other's; and He has been with us from time to time, through all the vicissitudes experienced. Yea, in blessing He has blessed us, and rendered us a blessing to each other. He hath enabled us to go, as it were, hand in hand, while pursuing the path cast up for us.

The tribulations attendant on illness, and twice that of death, have been heavy...

We have seldom been easy to stay at home more than a few months at a time, even since it has pleased the Almighty to vouchsafe to us our precious offspring.

Sarah Grubb, 1832

27.22 One of the chief ingredients of a lifelong relationship [is] to be able to be alone and to value oneself. Marriage is not a panacea for loneliness and getting married to avoid it can trap both partners.

Roger and Susan Sawtell, 2006

27.23 Meeting challenges and growing through them is an essential part of any relationship. Some people grow while others do not. Sometimes people grow apart rather than together. Difficult decisions sometimes have to be made.

> I know that I walk tallest, stand straightest, work best and feel happiest when I am with people with whom I can talk about whatever difficulties come among us. When painful knots in relating are unravelled, I dance. When there is no way of tending to those knots, there is heaviness within.
>
> Going into and through the dark in any relationship allows the light to happen.

Mary Rose, 2002

27.24 In past centuries, Friends could be disowned if they married outside the Quaker community. Nowadays, our closest relationships are very often with people who are not Quakers:

> When one partner becomes a Quaker there are a number of challenges to be faced when it comes to worshipping together. Specific times of one-to-one worship have never been part of our marriage because our temperaments are so different. The style that speaks to one may set the other's teeth on edge, and yet, at the heart of our marriage, is our shared commitment to our journey together in faith.

Roger and Susan Sawtell, 2006

27.25 Frank Treviss is a member of Hampstead Meeting in London. His wife, Naseem, is a Shia Imami Ismaili Muslim:

Being part of a One-Friend relationship can be an exciting and rewarding experience, although each partner must show a sensitivity to the practical, religious and theological needs of the other. Mutual support for each set of religious demands, beliefs and experiences can bring forth much discussion, tolerance, love and trust, independence, joy, a sense of togetherness and a deeper understanding of your partner and the ways and demands of other religious practices and paths to God. Often such a relationship exposes the similarities rather than the differences of religious beliefs and can develop understanding and tolerance between cultures and religions. A wider circle of friends is often a result of such relationships because of the lack of cultural and religious mistrust that sometimes exists in mono religious relationships.

The children of One-Friend relationships are especially fortunate in that there is often natural acceptance of what appears to the outside world to be two conflicting theologies. However, both partners must be careful to ensure that within the relationship both sets of religious beliefs must be respected, upheld and given equal value. Partners should not be disappointed if their offspring does not follow their way. It is not a sign that their child does not accept their beliefs, it is more that the child has chosen its own way, and it will carry along with it what it has learned from both its parents and others on its journey through life so far.

Frank Treviss, 2000

For more on Quaker marriages, see 14: Quaker marriage.

Being part of a family

27.26 Quakers have many different experiences of family life, both as children and as adults. It is important to support families of all kinds, as places where love can grow and a sense of belonging can be formed. Our understanding and experience of family also change over time.

The quotations in this section explore different perspectives on family relationships and how we can grow within them.

27.27 Reweaving webs of relationships is our main business in life. The process begins with the great separation that is birth. The ensuing bonding/reweaving between parent and newborn is no simple process because the individuality and conflicting needs of each assert themselves almost at once. All through life we go on bonding across differences, because we need others to make us whole. The tension involved in that bonding is part of the human condition, and we ignore or underestimate it at our peril. Loving isn't easy.

Elise Boulding, 1987

27.28 I had always wanted children. When I started dating women in my early 20s I knew that one day I would need help to create my own family. When a serious relationship ended in my early 30s, I began to think about becoming a solo parent. Having a child started to feel more urgent than starting a new relationship. I didn't want to compromise and settle with someone just because of the proverbial ticking clock. I started talking to family and close friends about the idea of going it alone.

Now, four months into becoming a mother, it's more intense than I could have imagined – the relentlessness of solo parenthood is not to be underestimated. I haven't yet spent more than an hour apart from my son since his birth. If he's up at all hours of the night, and then wants to start his day at 5am, I do the same. But being his mother is also more joyful than I ever dreamt of. Like all babies, he is a tiny miracle of a human. Feeling him grow inside me, and now watching him develop and transform before my eyes, I feel deeply grateful and of course privileged to live in a society, and at a moment in history, where my choice to become a solo mother to a donor-conceived child has been realised.

Anonymous, 2025

27.29 One young Friend describes their experience of growing up in a polycule (a group of individuals involved in romantic, sexual and platonic relationships that connect all the members of the group):

> The Quaker communities were always more accepting of my family than other places. I quickly learned to hide the fact my parents were part of a polycule in places like school, but talking to my Quaker friends about it was always less intimidating. I've always felt very supported by my family, and especially when I was younger, I found it confusing that people didn't have as large a support network as I did. I've always been very grateful for the polycule and for my local meeting.

I M, 2024

27.30 The eighteenth-century Quaker Catherine Phillips described the strong bond between her parents:

> When my father was disabled from acting for his family, being engaged in a partnership in one branch of business which terminated in great loss of property, his affairs were in a very unsettled state; all which, with other very trying circumstances, my mother passed through with admirable steadiness, fortitude and patience; and through a long series of necessary worldly engagements, she was favoured to retain the best life.
>
> Her steady and strong conjugal affection was manifested in my father's long indisposition, by tender attention; and after his decease, by her frequent mentioning him in terms which evinced that their union was founded on that love, which death cannot dissolve.

Catherine Phillips, 1797

27.31 Families include many kinds of relationship, including siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, as the following extracts explore.

27.32 I can still remember exactly where it happened. Mary and I were standing on the bridge across the middle of the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London. We were both in our early 20s. I was struggling to make ends meet in London, and Mary came down from Leeds for a weekend. I can't remember exactly what we were talking about, but at one point I felt a surge of worldly-wise impatience. 'If only she knew…' I started telling myself. Suddenly I realised that Mary knew all she needed to know. She had her own wisdom, even if it didn't match my particular experience. She was as grown-up as she needed to be…

What happened for me then was that I suddenly saw my 'know-it-all older brother' role for the delusion it was. Yes, perhaps I'd been very slightly further down some of life's byways before Mary. And maybe I'd spent a bit of our childhood figuring things out. But I was stuck in a pattern and a mindset that was an illusion, and probably a profoundly irritating one at that. I suddenly realised that I was reading back from the same dog-eared older brother script.

This might seem completely obvious, and barely worth noting. But I think that many siblings, especially those close in age, end up with relationships trapped in amber. We form a view of our sibling as we are young adults, and that view becomes a distorted bubble through which all of our later years are misinterpreted…

I feel doubly blessed, firstly for having a caring and insightful sister. And secondly for realising the value of that different thinking early enough to benefit from it.

John Fitzgerald, 2025

27.33 There is something quite special about relationship with one's grand-children, perhaps most of all in earlier childhood, when one slips into the garden of Eden with them for a spell. I don't even want to analyse what is so happy-making about this two-way relationship, although I constantly dwell upon it as one of the remarkable bonus

joys of these later years of [my] life. It is an experience that I have tasted for more than twenty years now, with six very different variations on the same theme.

Ruth Fawell, 1987

27.34 I have a vivid memory of a time when I was [at] the end of my rope. Everything the children did or said was a new outrage, and I couldn't stop yelling. Finally, my four-year-old took the toddler aside, explaining kindly to him: 'Mommy's tired. She's going to yell. Let's go play.' His voice was entirely free of either blame or shame. What a great gift to an overstretched mother – and what a hopeful sign for the future.

Pamela Haines, 2022

27.35 We learned never to give up on each other, and that love never fails. From family experiences we came to understand more about the Cross, about how generously God forgives, about human limits and the power of truth and love. We became less legalistic and more compassionate, but not without much agony of spirit. Familial love can rise above differing convictions and interests, we discovered. Moral judgment is not compromised by God's mercy, God's grace covers us all.

Arthur O Roberts, 1993

27.36 For some, being part of a Quaker community can offer a new sense of 'found family':

Through the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement I was introduced to Quakers, and started to find new family there. A life crisis resulted in my going to Pendle Hill, the Quaker study centre in Pennsylvania, where the community reached out and embraced me, supporting me through a major life transition and enabling me to learn and grow into my new self...

My newest found family, to my great surprise, is Finnish! In 2019 I was appointed by Britain Yearly Meeting as visitor to Finland Yearly Meeting [FYM]. On arrival I was immediately welcomed and made to feel at home – truly, among Ffriends. I have continued to attend FYM's twice-yearly gatherings and, thanks to the wonders of Zoom, join them in their twice-monthly online worship whenever possible, and am considered by many to be an honorary Finn. The unconditional love I receive on every visit teaches me so much about the love of God – I do nothing to deserve it, it's freely given, and it's poured out on me every time I turn up to say hallo.

Mary Woodward, 2025

Loss and grief

27.37 When we begin to love, we also open ourselves to loss. Losing a loved person is often desperately painful, and grief may persist for many years. In Quaker communities we aim to care for each other through our darkest times.

The quotations in this section explore the many ways that we experience loss and grief.

27.38 Grief may come in waves, but it probably won't. Waves are regular. Predictable. Diminish, however slowly, at a uniform rate which can be planned for.

Grief is more likely to come in dollops. Completely unpredictable, unruly and unfair. The size, timing and effect of a grief-dollop cannot be gauged in advance, and will very likely be inconvenient. Sometimes after years of relative silence. I speak here from lived experience, primarily of losing my father in 2020.

Grief demands its own space to be, and we must give our own, and others', that space. This can be counter-intuitive. When someone we love is in pain, it is natural to seek to diminish that pain. This is incorrect when the pain is grief.

Grief must be respected, because disrespecting grief inadvertently disrespects the subject of that grief. Think very carefully about what you wish to say to comfort someone who is grieving. If it could be meaningfully prefaced with 'Oh, well, at least…' please do not say it.

Alastair McIver, 2024

27.39 Some years ago, a dignified and weighty member of my Meeting was walking in the street. She was clearly still ruined by a recent loss… The pain of my Friend was evident. I felt ashamed at being unable to do anything for this woman; it choked me.

Like most people would, I wanted to offer something for the pain of these circumstances. But I was crippled and ashamed by the enormity of my inadequacy.

Now I have my turn. We lost our first child late in pregnancy, and I am writing this in the evening after his funeral, wrecked and devastated with grief, and with eyes that hurt from crying. Anyone who approaches me with any sense that they are in any way adequate to help me with my grief may as well stab me with a knife…

This is what brought me back to my inadequacy on that day in the street. I need not be ashamed of this inadequacy. It is the appropriate amount of respect that needs to be shown to those in grief.

Lloyd Pritchard, 2024

27.40 Familiar

Call it unfortunate if you will – I
Can certainly understand why –
But love is so persistent. It just goes on
After, you might reasonably say, its usefulness is done.
However silent the house, empty the bed,
Obsequies long since over, long since buried the dead…

Love is a damaged thing, trailing absurd,
Forlorn and pathetic as a dressing-gown cord.
Intimate as breath, loyal as a shadow, close as a cry.
Nothing will shake it off.
Nor should you try.

Rosie Bailey, 2010

27.41 When we lost our two-year-old daughter some 50 years ago, a Friend from our then Meeting popped in to bring her love, her condolences, and a card game for us to play with our two older children. That simple and imaginative act did more than anything else to help us through that dreadful time. I don't remember what game it was we played with the kids, but I'll never forget the Friend who helped to restore our determination to carry on. I now live in York and she lives in Bristol – and if she sees this, I want to say again: 'Thank you, Jean.'

Kurt Strauss, 2016

27.42 When she was 15 years old, Anya Dennis received the news that her cousin Brenda had died:

Grief is most likely something everyone will deal with at some point through the course of their life, but nothing prepares you for the type of grief caused by a loved one's suicide. Worrying over everyone around you thinking they are going to do the same, questioning why you weren't a reason to stay and the guilt that follows, lying in bed in darkness alone imagining how they did it, sitting in a cold classroom surrounded by people but feeling empty and alone wondering why they did it, trying to still love them while being so angry with them. Wondering if they went through with it but then regretted after it had become too late. I can't imagine what it feels like to regret something that huge but irreversible. A big part of me hopes she didn't regret it because I hate the thought of her being scared. I hate the thought of her feeling more alone than she did to go through with it.

Brenda wasn't just my cousin; she was the sister I never had and the woman I wanted to become. She took a piece of me with her the day she left [and] that missing piece in my heart is something I will never get back...

A semicolon is a symbol for suicide awareness because tough times do not mean the end of one's life, or a sentence, but can mean the significant bump in the journey to the start of happier and better times. I don't believe in sacrificing your own life goals to continue someone else's, but I do believe that I can honour her life through mine and make her proud every day while still living mine to the fullest until I meet her again.

Anya Dennis, 2023

27.43 The death of my beloved husband James at the age of ninety-three was expected, but with the twenty-year age difference between us he had tried to prepare me for his death for a number of years. I had rebuffed his efforts either by retorting 'You never know' or dissolving into tears...

It was good that we had a long period before James died of awareness that his health was deteriorating and we were able to talk about our feelings of great sadness coupled with thankfulness for what we were still sharing...

I cared for James until his death and, of course, it was physically and emotionally draining. I often cried in private like a hurt child. Struggling with the unpalatable fact that my husband was dying I knew that I needed to find strength to continue, as I felt passionately that I wanted to be left, for my own sake as well as James's, with as few regrets as possible. James eschewed help from carers, so I organised domestic help and a gardener so we could spend what time remained together and continue in a modified way with our normal life – seeing family and friends, going to Meeting and taking short trips in the car.

James's death was, like himself, gentle and peaceful, and I was with him as he died. I miss him and our life together more than I thought possible. I am comforted by the fact that he had left diaries that

he knew I would find among his writing, filled with humorous observations of the past, loving messages of consolation and of his own sadness at the inevitable separation. There were also files on loss and mourning marked: 'Jean you may find this useful.'

Grateful for his advice, I continue to grieve.

Jean Harbour, 2018

27.44 Twenty-seven years ago, my late and much-loved wife, who introduced me to Quakers, died suddenly after we had been together a mere thirty months, leaving me with our very young son and her teenage children. I then had several vivid experiences, hearing her voice and feeling comforted: they have not gone completely away.

Bereavement left me puzzled but never angry. We were sustained by the love and generosity of friends and Friends, and a focus on our youngster helped reduce 'self-pity', although much of the following year or so remains blank. Six years later I re-married and, quite undeservedly, have a truly loving partnership.

Although my experiences were 'really real', I remain unsure that I, or anyone else, will continue living after we die. In line with many Friends, I feel that, whether or not there is an afterlife to which we may or may not aspire, we are called to address, as best we can, the challenges of this current life.

Frank Boulton, 2015

27.45 Society of Friends

If I hoped the silence here would answer
it did not. I sat amongst them and I wept.

An hour, we breathed together. I felt dizzy
and unhelped. There was a little coughing;

every now and then a slow breath, in or out.
The woman in the purple jacket stood and said

Since Mary died I have been thinking
about grace. The loss of love is very sad.
I have been thinking that in anguish,
we experience grace; we find it
in the love of other people round us.

She sat. There were wild flowers
on the table in a pewter mug.

I cannot say that I was healed.
I knew, though, what she meant.

Jo Bell, 2015

27.46 At a prayer vigil for the victims of the shootings at Dunblane in 1996, Helen Steven offered these words:

It has been said over and over again that words cannot express how we feel about this tragedy. If words will not do, we are left with silence.

But not an empty silence.

My experience as a Quaker is that in the depths of a living silence, I find God. Many are also saying, 'where is God in all this?' God is here in the harshness of our grief and our anger, in our poignant memories and the bitterness of our pain.

And God is also here in the enfolding of goodness around, in the touch of hands, the warmth of a hug, the understanding glance.

Let us then be silent together, reaching down into ourselves and out to each other in love and compassion.

Helen Steven, 1996

27.47 In 1973 Marian Partington's younger sister, Lucy, disappeared. Twenty years later, her body was found, and Fred and Rosemary West were convicted of her murder:

For a year after the finding, her remains were needed as an exhibit for the defence. After this I felt an instinctive need to go to the mortuary in Cardiff to hold and wrap her bones. During that moving ceremony something shifted and I made a step towards peace.

In that same year I also began to go on Chan Buddhist retreats. It was at one of these that I made a vow to try and forgive the Wests. It seemed the most liberating, positive way forward. This was uncharted territory for me, but I have always believed there is something good in everyone.

When I came home from the retreat I had an overwhelming, involuntary, and profoundly physical experience of murderous rage: it went... Whoosh! All the way up from my belly to my skull. I wanted to scream, pull my hair out, claw at the ground. So for me, forgiveness began with murderous rage. Until then I hadn't thought of myself as a murderous person, but at that moment I was capable of killing. In other words, I was not separate from the Wests...

Since then my work has been about connecting with Rosemary West's humanity and refusing to go down the far easier and more predictable path of demonizing her. I take every opportunity to talk about her as a human being.

I once met another mother whose daughter had been murdered. She gave me a phrase that I now have pinned to my door: 'forgiveness means giving up all hope of a better past.' Gradually, I have grown to face, accept and integrate the unresolved pain of the past. I have imagined something of Rosemary West's suffering, something of Lucy's suffering. I do not wish Rosemary West more pain. Some people have asked whether I feel I'm betraying Lucy by doing this and I say, 'No, absolutely the opposite: I feel I'm honouring Lucy by lining myself up for forgiveness.'

Marian Partington, 2022

For more on Quaker experiences of bereavement, see 15: Quaker approaches to death and dying.

Chapter 28:

Growth and change

28.01 Our lives are all a journey, or perhaps a series of journeys. Maybe the journey is more important than the destination. We learn things along the way and become changed by what we experience. Our lives are shaped by things that happen to us. Our journey is influenced and made richer by what we encounter along the way. This in turn shapes and, hopefully, motivates us to make life better for our fellow travellers.

Living our beliefs, 2018

Introduction

28.02 Our lives are a constant journey of growth and change. Can we discern which changes to accept and which to challenge? Every stage of life offers opportunities for learning, and for greater openness to the divine presence in ourselves and others.

This chapter shares personal reflections on different aspects of change in the lives of Friends. It includes:

- Living adventurously
- Growing
- Living with uncertainty and imperfection
- Times of darkness
- Working lives
- Changes in society and technology
- Endings and letting go
- Ageing and approaching the end of life

Living adventurously

28.03 From the day we are born we are changing, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Welcoming the unexpected changes in our lives can free us to respond with openness and creativity.

28.04 Byddwch fyw yn anturus. Pan fo modd dewis, a ddewiswch y llwybr a rydd ichwi fwyaf o gyfle i ddefnyddio'ch doniau yng ngwasanaeth Duw a'r gymuned? Boed i'ch bywyd lefaru. Pan fo'n rhaid penderfynu, a ydych yn barod i ymuno ag eraill wrth chwilio am lwybr eglur, gan ofyn am arweiniad Duw a chan gynnig cyngor y naill i'r llall?

Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another?

Advices & queries / *Cynghorion a holiadau* 27, 1994

28.05 Perhaps the most neglected of all the advices is that we should live adventurously. If there is one wish I would pray the Spirit to put into our Christmas stockings, it is warmth, openness, passion, a bit of emotion that doesn't mind making a fool of itself occasionally.

Gerald Priestland, 1977

28.06 I believe in the powers of ordinary men and women; in their immense potentialities; in their capacity to rise higher than themselves; in their essential creativeness; in them as artists. I do not believe in the 'chosen few': I believe in us all.

I believe we were brought into this world to live and to enjoy it; to take out of it all that, in our full stature, we are able. I believe it then falls to every person to reach that state of fecundity and richness that makes him long to put back into life something uniquely his own.

I believe and glory in the uniqueness of every child and every man and woman. I believe that it is that uniqueness that above all needs to be cherished, protected, nourished and helped to grow and flower and come to fruition. Our job is to discern and to promote this uniqueness. In greater or lesser degree we each bear the privileged responsibility for using the artist in us. Yes: I believe in having the best of both, of all, worlds!

I believe that everyone should be successful. I believe, therefore, in the giving and accepting of praise. Praise and appreciation are necessary to us all. I believe that if all is well with the human element in our environment we are prepared to make the sustained effort that is necessary to ensure success.

I believe in work. I believe in play. On the whole I see no distinction. Let us not be afraid of work! Play – games – poetry – music – movement – all the Arts, are unnecessary yet absolutely essential. They make possible the impossible and reconcile the irreconcilable.

Robin Tanner, 1963

28.07 Death hangs a long way off. Do I just wait
And pass my youth through to my greying days
In petty pastimes, and misery for ways
Of life I dare not hope to live? My gait
Is twisted and my speech uncouth. I hate
The pity and the distance set around
By those who see and dare not know, so bound
By other's expectations. Am I too late
To live; to study how to learn; to try
And fail yet seek another way to give,
To gain myself? In this exchange the dry
Desert of my poverty may flower – live
In ways undreamed – and the pain of fading
Hopes will disappear in life's rich trading.

Jonathan Griffith, 1977

Growing

28.08 We can continue to grow throughout our lives, in our gifts, relationships and openness to the Divine. As we support young people to grow into independence, can we also learn from them and be inspired by their insights and example?

28.09 Development of personality is a continuing process – never completed. A child may be clear about its needs and wants, but then come the often tumultuous years of adolescence, of coming to terms with new and powerful sexual drives. Teenagers begin to realise themselves as separate and different from parents and friends. It is no easy task to live up to ideals and at the same time to accommodate rival claims and impulses. It is at this time that Quaker children often experience particular difficulties in adjusting to a world beyond their own home where values, standards and expectations are different from those they have grown up with. Do we try to understand the difficulties, stresses and failures of our growing children and make them fully aware that, come what may, they are still loved? This does not mean that we give them unlimited licence. They still need an adequate framework within which it is safe to experiment and rebel.

Rosalind Priestman, 1985

28.10 Our children are given to us for a time to cherish, to protect, to nurture, and then to salute as they go their separate ways. They too have the light of God within, and a family should be a learning community in which children not only learn skills and values from parents, but in which adults learn new ways of experiencing things and seeing things through young eyes. From their birth on, let us cultivate the habit of dialogue and receptive listening. We should respect their right to grow into their own wholeness, not just the wholeness we may wish for them. If we lead fulfilling lives ourselves, we can avoid overprotecting them or trying to live through them.

Elizabeth Watson, 1980

28.11 We cannot hope to transfer more than a little of our wisdom to our young people – if wisdom it is. We have increasingly to stand back as they grow older, knowing that the problem is passing out of our hands. They go off to college – or to live in a flat of their own, that aim and delight of so many young people. At last they have privacy, freedom from supervision and criticism, independence – but they are now fully exposed to all that we fear. Often they have much more self-confidence than is justified ('I can take care of myself'), and they little know that to avoid disaster they must avoid the circumstances in which the first sequence of events takes place. Many are carried headlong into sexual experiences that they did not intend or foresee.

This is the moment of disengagement, when parents must tell themselves that the young people are no longer their children and that they are outside their discipline. The decisions made by the young men and women mustn't be clouded by confusion with parental emotions ('How can you bear to hurt your mother?'). Parents cannot help being anxious, but they must bear that in themselves, not project it. They cannot live their children's lives for them.

It is also the moment for parents to tell themselves that their children are not alone. They are in the hands of God. God does not offer any kind of perfection in the actual circumstances of life, nor freedom from exposure to evil. Nor will parents ever be able – if they are honest – to look back over their experience of parenthood without being conscious of imperfections in their own understanding and handling of their children.

Kenneth C Barnes, 1960

28.12 As a family – we have three young children – we try our best to live simply, to do our best to care for our planet and our environment. We try to raise our children to appreciate the importance of acceptance and compassion and to value the stillness of Quaker worship. Being a Quaker helps me to look beyond myself, to think

of others and to try to share with them some of the strength and inspiration I have found. I still view myself as learning, still discovering; understanding my Quaker faith more deeply and living it more fully and faithfully.

Kevin, 2018

28.13 I was the only Quaker in my primary school, and one of a handful in my secondary school. Most of my non Quaker friends didn't know any other Quakers, and I grew used to this feeling. So, when I was also the first queer, and later trans, friend that most of my friends had, it was nothing new. Sometimes I felt weird even among other Quakers... but I never felt a need to hide or deny who I was, and while this was not entirely down to Quakerism (some credit must go to my neurodivergence and my parents for loving me enduringly), certainly it was something that Quaker spaces fostered and encouraged in me by celebrating the person I was at every point, greeting me happily wherever I was...

Learning to be still and quiet together is incredibly rare for many young people: a space that so easily facilitates reflection and introspection and regulation, both by oneself and in community. I don't know many people who had something like that as a kid – it's not available at school, or (often) at home, or clubs or (from my experience) in more prescriptive faiths – and I think it's a huge part of why/how I show up in the world, for myself and others. Quakerism was, and always will be, the first community, the first feeling of home outside of my house, the first found family I ever experienced. To get that, so young, is a rare and precious gift.

Max, 2025

28.14 Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teaching's great rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiralling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the

young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn.

Parker J Palmer, 1997

Living with uncertainty and imperfection

28.15 Suffering, mistakes and failure are all part of a full human life. Can we learn to accept that we are not perfect, to live with our limitations, and use them to grow in compassionate understanding of others?

28.16 It is difficult for us to reconcile the two ideas of God as a loving Father and as the Creator of all things, because of the existence of cruelty and undeserved suffering in Nature itself. Jesus apparently did take for granted the idea that God controlled the rising of the sun and falling of the rain and had made us male and female. It makes me long to have him here now so that I could ask him some of the questions that his disciples didn't ask him. In fact I find that I am talking to him in my mind and that it is a great deal more profitable than talking to myself; even though it is, in one sense, talking to myself; and even though I don't get the answers to the questions that puzzle me. But that doesn't worry me now, because I have learned, as a scientist, how much I don't understand. I have learned too that when a scientist encounters two apparently irreconcilable ideas, these are the stepping stones to new knowledge.

Kathleen Lonsdale, 1962

28.17 Some situations which cause pain or suffering are avoidable, so part of our learning must be to analyse the situation and see if this is such a case. If it is, we must try to prevent it happening again. But perhaps the most painful situations are those that are apparently beyond our control. Another part of our learning is to recognise that there is unfairness, uncertainty, fear, loneliness and hurt in this world; learning to accept that this is the nature of the world can, of itself, be painful.

Initially we may be able to do little, bound up in an acute, self-centred pain. As we try to cope with the anger, the pain and grief that come through some unhappy experience, we can learn a lot about the less-well-articulated, darker sides of our personality. These darker aspects should not be ignored. Although we tend to equate evil with darkness, we should remember that in the plant world roots grow in the dark. Darkness (and shadows) are as much a part of the natural order as light.

S Jocelyn Burnell, 1989

Admitting the possibilities of error



28.18 This drawing is one of a series of meditations on error. Each begins with the perimeter line of a perfect circle and evolves from my repeated attempts to perfectly copy the preceding line. My mistakes create the drawing's fascinating shapes, reminiscent of fingerprints and tree rings. Mistakes are all too often seen as negative and painful; however, if we take the time to consider the possibilities that they may offer, they can also be sources of learning, inspiration, discovery and reconciliation.

The use of gold in this particular drawing is inspired by the related Japanese philosophies of kintsugi and wabi-sabi. Literally meaning 'golden repair', kintsugi reveals the scars of time and mishap in its approach to broken objects. Wabi-sabi is an aesthetic centred on the acceptance of flaws and transience, finding beauty in the impermanent, incomplete and imperfect.

As a Quaker, I believe that there is something of God in everyone. One place that God (or Good) might be found in our twenty-first century world is in the process of learning from, and acceptance of, our mistakes as well as those made by others.

Kirsten Lavers, 2020

28.19 My wife Jenny and I have been married for 55 years, and never a cross word I sometimes joke. But that would be absurd. As Kenneth Barnes said, 'It is by our "imperfections" that we move towards each other, towards the wholeness of relationship. It is our oddities, our grittiness, the occasions when we hurt or are hurt, that challenge us to a deeper knowledge of each other. Our sins have been said to be stepping stones to God' [*Quaker faith & practice* 21.07, 1994] Jenny is still a mystery to me in many ways but you can get to know someone really well when you live with them for half a century. Like everyone we've had our ups and downs – at one agonisingly dark time our marriage hung by a thread, and yes it was my fault; my darkness at the time seemed impenetrable.

But as Stuart Yates wrote, 'If it does not overwhelm us, darkness provides the sustenance, the soil, for our journey towards the light' [*The Friend*, 7 April 2017]... One amazing and completely unexpected blessing is that through all our stresses and trials we discovered that forgiveness was factored into the marriage; it was and is a given. Of course we have to try to put things right and as far as we can 'not let the sun go down on our wrath', but it is an immense consolation to know that even when our 'oddities and grittiness' have caused pain we know we are forgiven even before the offence is committed. With our wounds we are healed. And those emotional growing pains allow us to show each other what I call compassionate indifference, the capacity in times of tension and disturbance to detach with love.

Laurie Andrews, 2017

28.20 What use is spirituality when you are really upset?... when the proverbial has hit the fan – when your world has turned upside down, and you are feeling rejected, abandoned, angry, fearful, desolate, sad, furious and sad again – is spirituality and spiritual practice any help at all? Can one have all these feelings and still connect with a sense of something greater?... But maybe I am not asking the right question. 'Spirituality isn't an either/or,' says a wise friend, 'it's about being real. Being connected. Really feeling whatever is going on.'

Kate Graham, 2024

28.21 At one point in my life I became acutely aware of the internal effects of a significant resentment toward another person, generated by a deeply hurtful experience... One of my spiritual mentors advised me to pray for that person whose actions had caused me to feel this deep anger and resentment. She said that I did not even have to mean it but [I] should ask that this person be given everything I would hope to have myself for a happy, full life. I did as instructed. Within two short weeks I found myself softening...

Eventually I was able to feel true compassion for him. It was, for me, a miraculous transformation. This prayer became an indispensable tool in my life and the basis for reconciliation as a spiritual practice.

Connie McPeak Green, 2008

See also 2: Quaker spiritual experience and 27: Love and loss.

Times of darkness

28.22 Inward suffering can open us to a deeper understanding of ourselves, others and the divine presence in the world. There are also times when suffering brings no sense of meaning and we need others to help us rediscover a sense of hope. It is important to acknowledge our own pain as well as others', and to hold it with compassion.

28.23 I was under great temptations sometimes, and my inward sufferings were heavy; but I could find none to open my condition to but the Lord alone, unto whom I cried night and day. And I went back into Nottinghamshire, and there the Lord shewed me that the natures of those things which were hurtful without, were within in the hearts and minds of wicked men... And I cried to the Lord, saying, 'Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit those evils?' And the Lord answered that it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions; and in this I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings.

George Fox, 1647

28.24 I value the Psalms so much. The psalmists don't pretend. They are frightened, they doubt, they rage, they question the Spirit. Psalm 88 is the most terrible, 'You have put me in the depths of the Pit... O Lord, why do you cast me off?' Most of the desperate psalms finish with

some sense of renewal, but in this one there is no word of relief. The one positive element is that the lyricist feels it is worth laying out all their misery before God. Somehow, howling from the depths is not just a hopeless cry. Beyond the clouds of the dark night, we sense that there might be invisible stars of hope and perhaps a sunrise.

Beth Allen, 2023

28.25 At some times I have felt very definitely the guiding hand of God, steering my life in certain directions and this is a very wonderful and rich feeling. Yet at other times, and for quite long periods, I have known the empty loneliness and even despair which comes from depression. Everything seems dry and arid, and friendships which at other times are a source of joy seem empty and meaningless. There are times when God and my personal faith seem to be completely beyond my reach or understanding. These are frightening times, because the work or activities I seek to do have no apparent value or reason. Life seems an endless struggle and the prospect of having to live within the extreme limitations of my disabilities, with the knowledge that with the passing years they will become rather worse than better, is a daunting thought. There are some mornings when I wake up during times of depression when I simply want to cease living.

Bernard Brett, 1987

28.26 Pain isolates one. It pervades everything; blackens the sky, pushes other humans away, reduces music and poetry and the outside world to dullness; grinds on and on endlessly.

Some say that Christianity is a morbid religion, over-emphasising a Christ tormented on a cross. I can only say that even as a child I could sometimes comfort myself in pain by remembering his suffering... It was Jesus the man, enduring agonising pain in terrible loneliness, who spoke to my condition and brought me sometimes much needed consolation.

Joan Fitch, 1988

28.27 The amount of solitude which is attainable or would be wholesome in the case of any individual life is a matter which each of us must judge for himself... A due proportion of solitude is one of the most important conditions of mental health. Therefore if it be our lot to stand apart from those close natural ties by which life is for most people shaped and filled, let us not be in haste to fill the gap; let us not carelessly or rashly throw away the opportunity of entering into that deeper and more continual acquaintance with the unseen and eternal things which is the natural and great compensation for the loss of easier joys. The loneliness which we rightly dread is not the absence of human faces and voices – it is the absence of love... Our wisdom therefore must lie in learning not to shrink from anything that may be in store for us, but so to grasp the master key of life as to be able to turn everything to good and fruitful account.

Caroline E Stephen, 1908

28.28 To be hurt by another, or even ourselves, brings a sense of isolation. A wounding remark, a physical blow, carries a powerful message; but it is not easy to respond in a way which does not compound violence. We often prefer to cut off communication, refusing to hear the deeper meaning in what has been thrown at us. In our local communities we talk of 'mindless vandalism' and 'football hooligans', in politics of 'terrorists'; and by doing so we deny that profound and terrible feelings of hurt and rejection underlie the behaviour which we are right to deplore. In our private lives too, we develop an armoury which defends us from the pain of others, especially when it takes forms which pass the hurt onto us.

Forgiveness is the medicine which can heal these hurts; but to reach the place where forgiveness can be offered and accepted may be a long hard journey. At the beginning of the task of healing, first aid is often needed. That involves each of us caring about the loneliness of pain. It means building our relationships strong enough to contain it. It means risking contamination from it, deliberatively laying aside

that defensive armour and allowing ourselves to get hurt too. It is painful to see and hear great distress. It may be shown as anger, which feels like an attack on us, or as grief, which makes us feel helpless and exposed.

John Lampen, 1987

28.29 I thought back to my own times of sadness. They had been acute and I had prayed for relief. But gradually I had felt towards the awareness that there was a harsh reality about pain and sadness more tangible than words and phrases. To write about pain is to run into the danger of wrapping up sadness in words and pushing it outside. But sadness had brought home to me that all wisdom fails, all books are empty, in the face of the inescapable experience of pain. Sadness has its own authority.

It built a bridge to others. But to do this the pain had to be accepted, acknowledged as a companion. If pain brought bitterness and an irresistible desire to blame others and punish them, then it was isolating. If it was accepted as a personal burden, it opened a door to the souls of others seeking answers to the mystery of suffering.

I was also made aware that when I had met other people of different faiths or of none, who seemed to know the same experience of loss and bewilderment and search below the level of words and creeds, then we found that, despite differences, we were strangely at one.

Could this be the path to a new sense of unity, the community of those who had known pain, and thence had found depth, so that creeds and traditions became but signposts to an acceptance of sadness and an entry into a depth where we found harmony with each other? Was this the way forward to a deeper unity with people of other religions or indeed of none? Perhaps we could start with the simple discovery that words divide and sadness unites.

Robert Tod, 1989

28.30 Art thou in the Darkness? Mind it not, for if thou dost it will fill thee more, but stand still and act not, and wait in patience till Light arises out of Darkness to lead thee. Art thou wounded in conscience? Feed not there, but abide in the Light which leads to Grace and Truth, which teaches to deny, and puts off the weight, and removes the cause, and brings saving health to Light.

James Nayler, 1659

See also 2: Quaker spiritual experience and 27: Love and loss.

Working lives

28.31 Our working lives are an opportunity to use our gifts in creative service to the world. Work done well for a worthwhile purpose can be a source of deep satisfaction, whether in paid employment or voluntary service.

28.32 When I was a teenager and beginning to think about a career, my father advised me to choose between working with people and working with things, and I sensed an implied judgment that working with people was more worthy.

In the event, the decision was made for me when I married a self-employed engineer with no interest in the record-keeping side of his business. We now work very happily together from home, designing and supplying special purpose machinery to the brush industry. We deliberately keep our business small and more or less manageable. We are not interested in the financial dealings, stocks and shares, investments and take-overs which the press seems to regard as the essence of business.

I see the basis of industry as being a global network of barter, a mutual dependency, a contract of trust for the supply of the necessities and luxuries of life. The opportunities of industry are as large as the needs of the world's people. Every object we use has to be designed, manufactured and sold by someone. It is an

honourable occupation to apply one's talents to the marketplace. One person's need becomes another's opportunity, his livelihood, his dignity. 'Working with things' is not devoid of scope for a spiritual attitude...

Perhaps a function of industry is to reflect that of God that is creation and glory. We can be creative in our small way in God's image; we can work in partnership with God, combining natural and human resources; we can extract order from chaos.

Rachel Jackson, 1990

28.33 Sitting here looking out over the Atlantic, over the Hebridean isles, some may describe me as isolated, remote. Here, living for a brief moment in its time, I am custodian of this piece of land, which I use to raise sheep, chickens and ducks. Whilst my neighbours may not be close, it is hard to not feel a direct connection to the other people, men, women and children that have worked this very patch of land through the years, and to marvel at the work they did without the machinery that I now take as normal and essential on our croft...

I live on the south-west peninsula of Mull known as the Ross of Mull, two miles from the village of Bunessan, a thriving hub of activity with the school pub and post office, and a population of 200. It is 30 miles of single-track road from the ferry port, which is an hour's sailing from Oban on the mainland.

A croft is a piece of mostly poor agricultural land historically worked by cottars or crofters who lived on the land, handing on their tenancy through the generations. Many of these people were violently evicted in the clearances from the 1750s to 1855, leading to many people emigrating to the new world – Australia, the United States and Canada – to make way for sheep, who were more profitable than tenants.

Rob Claxton-Ingham, 2025

28.34 From a testimony concerning Marion Fairweather (1981–2018):

> Marion was many things to many people: a great friend, a fun person to be around, a natural carer for others, a moral force, a quiet influencer, a polite rebel, a student of humanity, a spiritual light, a cultural guru, an enigma, a law unto herself, and a fantastic dancer...
>
> She studied social anthropology at Edinburgh University, a natural choice for someone whose fascination with humanity never dimmed. She used her university studies and her subsequent training as a teacher of English as a Second Language as a springboard to take her off into whatever far flung parts of the world grabbed her interest. She lived in India, Japan and Mexico, each time coming back to her friends with incredible stories of what she had seen and who she had met.
>
> After settling in Glasgow, she set her mind to jobs that chimed with her values and beliefs, working throughout the voluntary sector in jobs that promoted the interests and welfare of disadvantaged people – coordinating a befriending service, advocating for vulnerable young people, campaigning against the effects of poverty in education. In this last role, which she was working on before she became ill, she helped to develop the Cost of the School Day toolkit, which enables schools to identify and address inequalities of opportunities for their pupils, and which is now being rolled out nationwide.
>
> West Scotland Area Meeting, 2019

28.35 From a testimony concerning Arthur Basil Reynolds (1903–1960):

> Arthur Basil Reynolds... had that strong sense of the indwelling spirit of God which perforce claimed kinship with everything good and of enduring value in other men and in the world at large. He worked for the continuity of the good life; and to preserve what was good from the past, to hold fast and perpetuate what was good in the present and to work for the hope of good in the future.

He was a man of creative imagination, a craftsman with vision and courage who delighted in the work of his hands and was able to inspire others with the same spirit. He had the seeing eye and the unerring hand to translate the vision into actuality. As he walked the countryside a twig in the hedge would suggest a shape of grace and gaiety and his penknife would speedily produce a dancing figure of elfish beauty. All that he touched witnessed to this creative power.

His training as a cabinet-maker was put to use in the workshops at Brynmawr during the unemployment and distress of the depression, when he worked with Friends and others to provide employment and thus to bring renewed hope and self-respect to the mining community. He became manager of the Brynmawr Furniture Makers, an undertaking that successfully produced worthy and beautiful furniture.

Hereford and Radnor Monthly Meeting, 1961

28.36 From a testimony concerning Percy Cleave (1880–1958):

By occupation he was a barber, and on moving into this district in 1937 from Swindon, he first took a shop in Wallington, and later one in a poor part of Croydon. Not all who went there did so for a shave or a haircut, but to enjoy its friendly atmosphere, and to talk to Percy. 'I am sure,' said a friend of his, 'that as Percy rubbed oil into a customer's hair, he blessed him.' This would have been natural, since he desired all his actions to be sacramental. He was very positive in his relationships with others, and took a lively interest in all their doings... He was a man whom adversity had refined. It was often surprising when talking to him, to hear of the multitudes of troubles he and his wife had borne. He had accepted the changes and chances of this life, but had not forgotten them, and so could sympathise with those who were still struggling. He had great insight, and was able to see to the heart of a problem. Since he was in a small way of business which barely brought in sufficient money, he had a hard time which persisted until his retirement, when he sought so to arrange his life, that others could speak to him at

leisure and without hurry. It was then that he ministered to some families of Friends by going to their homes and cutting their hair. It was pleasant to see him starting on the littlest ones and proceed in order to the adults. To have Percy cut your hair was a grace.

Kingston Monthly Meeting, 1958

For more on testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of deceased Friends, see 15: Quaker approaches to death and dying.

28.37 We are challenged to live with integrity and to express our Quaker testimony in every aspect of our lives, including our work:

Whichever sphere of activity we are involved in, we have to be responsive to the Spirit's leadings and try to put into practice our deepest beliefs, for our faith is a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week faith, which is not excluded from our workplace, wherever that may be. Everything in the end can be distilled to relationships – our relationships with each other and the earth. Our work must benefit our relationships rather than damage them, and we must ensure that neither the earth nor other people are exploited. Caring, not exploitation, is the key.

Jane Stokes, 1992

28.38 From a testimony concerning Geoffrey Cundall (1924–2015):

All aspects of his life were guided by his understanding of Quaker belief and practice, not least as a businessman.

Geoffrey's experience of professional work as a Consulting Engineer in Newcastle and as a lecturer in Building Science at both Manchester and Sheffield Universities challenged his beliefs and in 1976, in his fifties, he became dissatisfied with what he saw of business practice and determined to start a firm according to the values he lived his life by. It was a brave and... adventurous move.

Through very hard work and with the support of four much younger partners, the venture succeeded with the establishment of the firm Cundall, Johnston and Partners (CJP), in Newcastle. The founding partners shared a common vision that the practice should become a leading multi-disciplinary engineering consultancy built on sound, ethical principles. Central to this vision too was the nurturing and mentoring of colleagues, in particular younger colleagues at the beginning of their career.

In the obituary posted on [CJP's] website, tribute is paid to Geoffrey's original vision for the firm, identifying the source of inspiration behind it: 'Geoffrey was a Quaker [and] one of his main motivations to establish a new practice was for it to reflect his own values of honesty, integrity, commitment, supportiveness and responsibility'.

Northumbria Area Meeting, 2017

28.39 A Quaker in our workplace! 'What does that mean?' curious colleagues ask. Alas, being a Quaker provides no magic winning edge nor automatic wisdom. I frequently consider I may be mistaken and am rarely saved from disappointments, knives in the back or the irritations of colleagues, clients, bosses, banks, suppliers and auditors. Yet each day when I come into [the] office or switch on the office laptop, it is my Quaker values which kick in like a shot of double strength espresso. Equality – everyone respected and accorded equal value irrespective of role, salary level, or compatibility; simplicity – keeping language plain, goals clear, processes transparent, meetings short; peace – so easy to say and difficult to achieve, but the basis on which trust and reputation are built; sustainability – careful, beady-eyed stewardship of resources and the environment; and finally truth or integrity – taking time to look beneath the language of a conversation, to listen actively to what is left unsaid or showing behind the eyes. These Quaker testimonies we live by are, for me, the vital sparks required for a happy, productive, successful workplace.

Antonia Swinson, 2023

For more on being a Quaker in the workplace, see 23: Quakers and wider society.

Changes in society and technology

28.40 Wider society is changing, offering new ways to build and maintain relationships. New technologies bring risks as well as benefits, and call for careful discernment.

28.41 [Social media] is simply a contemporary mode of communication – a tool to be used. With any tool we should exercise awareness of its pitfalls and capabilities, and use it accordingly. I believe that social media is best used to facilitate the bringing together of people, ideally face to unmediated face. It is a poor replacement for a smile or an embrace, but it is incredibly useful when it comes to bringing about such moments.

Chris Alton, 2018

28.42 Many who use social media find it an amazing boon. It's been used to organise protest movements, facilitates networking for communities who find it difficult by more traditional means, and allows people to find connection, to feel connected, who might otherwise be isolated. It has also certainly been effective for marketing, provided you have the know-how and the budget. We need only look at its reported importance in recent elections and referenda in various countries to know how much of an impact it can have – including when it is used dishonestly. Even where it is useful, that same usefulness is a peril; that does not remove, however, that usefulness, nor render it inherently unsafe.

Sam Barnett-Cormack, 2019

28.43 People can develop intense relationships with social media personalities and public figures and not realise that these are one-

sided. Their followers or fans feel they have intimate knowledge of this person and their life, and do not realise that they are seeing an extremely curated version of that life, which often omits the challenges and difficulties their 'idol' may be facing because they too are only human.

As Quakers we need to be mindful that we are all equal, and equally precious, and that no one singular person should be held up as an 'idol'. Quakers encourage relationships embodying mutual respect and love. These cannot be present in parasocial relationships, where the idolised person is unlikely to know that their devoted follower even exists.

Pearl Johns, 2024

28.44 Quaker youth worker Jo Baynham describes the importance of setting boundaries on the use of technology:

Whereas parental tolerance for physical risk has reduced significantly over the generations... tolerance for online risk has been extraordinarily high, although almost certainly by accident and ignorance.

It is commonplace now for a parent to deny a nine-year-old attending out-of-sight, unsupervised sport in an evening with friends, in favour of allowing several hours of ultra-violent, misogynistic war simulation computer gaming with an unknown group of live users connected by headset, or hours of unsupervised social media scrolling which can oftentimes have similarly unhelpful content...

At our residential events we take in, and keep in boxes, all phones from the outset. By the end, around 90% of the young people are glad we had... but it is very hard for some. Nonetheless, engagement, presence, joy, and attention increase enormously.

As the corpus of evidence regarding the damage that [the] handheld internet does to children and teens grows, parents and youth workers have to work out where their responsibilities to children and young people begin and end; and what to do about technology that we have put in the hands of young people.

Jo Baynham, 2025

Endings and letting go

28.45 Endings can be unwelcome and painful. Letting go of cherished relationships calls for patience and forgiveness of ourselves and others.

28.46 Relationships do not always turn out 'perfectly'. People change, grow apart, or decide for other reasons to end a relationship. Being aware of that of God in the person from whom one is separating is as important a part of ending a relationship as it is of beginning one.

Another way of looking at the separation and divorce with its pain and sadness is that perhaps my wife and I were fulfilling important life lessons for each other, opening new possibilities and raising self-awareness by identifying each other's strengths, weaknesses, priorities and failures.

This we can say, 1995

28.47 Changes in ourselves and others may lead to relationships coming to an inevitable end. Whether the loved one is removed by death or by separation, the time of re-adjustment is stressful and difficult. We need time to mourn. We all know of the heartache and sometimes the liberation that divorce brings. We encounter these experiences in the Quaker community of our local meeting just as much as in our families and neighbourhood. There are many single-parent families and reconstituted families with step-children, where all those who are involved have been touched and deeply affected by the events that led up to the crisis and what followed. As a result, there are many people who are in great need of imaginative and ongoing support from

their meeting. There will be feelings of bereavement, as of losing part of themselves, of loneliness, frustration, resentment and anxiety. This may lead to depression and an acute feeling of isolation, but it is then that we often discover new strengths in ourselves, and the value of true friendship... The ability to forgive and to accept the forgiveness of others may be the doorway that leads to new beginnings.

Rosalind Priestman, 1985

28.48 Years after my husband had left me and our children I was very ashamed at how much private anger and resentment I still felt towards him. I confessed this to a very dear Friend, Maria Bruce, who was surprised and said: 'But your anger and resentment have sustained you – without them you might have sunk into depression or despair. So don't be ashamed of them – you have used them to good purpose.' I never felt either guilt or anger again.

Anonymous, *c.*1980

28.49 In affirming that people are more important than rules, we are not denying that we have responsibilities. All our actions have consequences that must be thought about, perhaps prayed about, especially where children are concerned. Finding discernment may not be easy because we do not necessarily know that consequences will ensue. For some a dark and difficult experience – which feels like death – may be the beginning of a birth. And that dark and difficult experience may be to stay in a relationship; or to leave it or to be left. When we are tempted to judge other people it is important to remember how impossible it is ever to know what goes on inside from the outside of a relationship.

This we can say, 1995

28.50 I have had to learn to face the hard truth that no relationship, no person, can be 'owned' or kept forever, that loss is a part of life and something to be reckoned with. At the same time I am trying

to learn to believe that loss is not necessarily the substance of life, neither is it the sole outcome or fruit of my attempts to love. This takes immense courage.

This we can say, 1995

28.51 Recycling facility

What shall I do with this, the old lady asks,
Offering a telephone. *It still works.*
Not now, it doesn't. He chucks it in a skip.

Such casual ruthlessness disturbs: the oven,
The quick-lime pits... but we drive away
Lightened, delivered – a new start? A clean slate?
Something about poverty, chastity, even obedience calls.

Simplicity's not for us. Merely living
Brings in its wake a tide of rubbish we can't wait
To bin. *Recycling's* the word that makes it OK
To throw so many things away.
Is nothing meant to last?

What should we do with these, the old,
The bad, the helpless?
They still work.

Rosie Bailey, 2022

See also 14: Quaker marriage and 27: Love and loss.

Ageing and approaching the end of life

28.52 Ageing can bring suffering and disappointments, but also new opportunities for relationships and spiritual wisdom. As we approach the end of our life, whenever that comes, we may need others to be channels of divine love for us.

28.53 If we are getting older it will be harder to acknowledge that we have not been called to spectacular service, that we are unlikely now to make a stir in the world, that our former dreams of doing some great healing work had a great deal of personal ambition in them.

A great many men and women have had to learn this unpalatable lesson – and then have discovered that magnificent opportunities lay all around them. We need not go to the ends of the earth to find them; we need not be young, clever, fit, beautiful, talented, trained, eloquent or very wise. We shall find them among our neighbours as well as among strangers, in our own families as well as in unfamiliar circles – magnificent opportunities to be kind and patient and understanding.

This is a vocation just as truly as some more obviously seen as such – the vocation of ordinary men and women called to continual, unspectacular acts of loving kindness in the ordinary setting of every day. They need no special medical boards before they embark on their service, need no inoculation against anything but indifference and lethargy and perhaps a self-indulgent shyness. How simple it sounds; how difficult it often is; how possible it may become by the grace of God.

Clifford Haigh, 1962

28.54 We must be confident that there is still more 'life' to be 'lived' and yet more heights to be scaled. The tragedy of middle age is that, so often, men and women cease to press 'towards the goal of their high calling'. They cease learning, cease growing; they give up and resign from life. As wisdom dawns with age, we begin to measure our experiences not by what life gives to us, not by the things withheld from us, but by their power to help us to grow in spiritual wisdom.

Evelyn Sturge, 1949

28.55 Late light, photographers tell us, is the richest light of all. In the hour before the sun sets, it imbues the landscape with depth and warmth. This is a dynamic and fleeting time. So too, in the last years of your life, your inner light begins to shift. New wavelengths prevail, slower and more beautiful. You can approach your life with greater clarity and tenderness.

If you let divine Light in, your later years can open you to love's mature fullness. You can make your peace with old issues and draw people close. This can be a time for accelerated growth of spirit, and your experience can light the way for others.

Patti Nesbitt and Kristin Camitta Zimet, 2024

28.56 Damaris Parker-Rhodes describes her experience during treatment for cancer:

Following the operation all sense of God disappeared, and anyone who came to my bedside (and the love and visiting I received was one of the great treasures of my life) I asked to take my hand and mediate God's love to me. In fact healing and prayer surrounded me on every hand, although I myself felt cut off in complete inner aridity except when actually held in the inner place by someone taking my hand and praying.

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1985

28.57 'Caring matters most' has been quoted to us when seeking direction during our active years. But many of us will find that we ourselves are in need of full care in our old age. This will not be easy. It calls for 'a different kind of living', as one Friend commented when answering questions about [their] experience in a home for the elderly. Uprooted from familiar well-loved things, of house and neighbours, released from stabilising responsibilities (however small), there will be adjustments to be made.

But there are compensations and opportunities. Loss of physical well-being can bring a new experience of the strength of the Spirit which can overcome pain and suffering. A new and fuller understanding of prayer can come, given the time to study and practise how to pray. And in the experience of living in a Home with others, a deep sense of sharing the darkness and the light can lead to a sense of community not known before. Finally, living close to physical death (our own and that of others), we come to recognise death as a natural and often welcome event. Yet another movement of growth into the fullness of the knowledge of God.

Margaret L McNeill, 1990

28.58 Shelagh Robinson shares an experience of living with dementia:

I hold in my heart the memory of getting very confused and someone I love very much, recognising my distress, took both my hands and said: 'I know you are frightened, but you are here where you are supposed to be. You are safe and we love you.' *You are safe and we love you*: perhaps the best message that anyone with dementia can ever be given.

Shelagh Robinson, 2017

28.59 We need to go on learning all our lives, and that knowledge is not necessarily intellectual. We have experienced the struggle, tried our best, sought to succeed in whatever field the problems lay, and maybe we cannot let go. But age calls us to review, to get a balance, to accept that our aims have changed. To fail to adjust our sights to the new situation can cause serious harm. To continue to seek financial security may be inappropriate and could limit the expression of generosity. To try to win all the games sets impossibly high targets as the physical or mental process deteriorates. To luxuriate in a feeling of status can be harmful. Yes, it is hard to readjust but not to do so can lead to spiritual diminishment, to the spoiling of relationships and to sorrow.

So I turn back to that great unifier of love as my guide. There I am safe. Sometimes gladly giving, sometimes gratefully receiving, never unaware of the mystery which I know cannot be resolved and is cyclical in nature.

Norman Richardson, 2010

28.60 I am convinced it is a great art to know how to grow old gracefully, and I am determined to practise it... I always thought I should love to grow old, and I find it is even more delightful than I thought. It is so delicious to be done with things, and to feel no need any longer to concern myself much about earthly affairs... I am tremendously content to let one activity after another go, and to await quietly and happily the opening of the door at the end of the passage-way, that will let me in to my real abiding place.

Hannah Whitall Smith, 1903

28.61 Following a medical diagnosis, particularly of the terminal kind, there comes a period of acute distress, followed by denial, and then often by anger. If we are fortunate, a kind of dull acceptance comes next, often coupled with a determination to fight on. I cannot speak for everyone, of course, but this is my experience so far. Much, of course, depends upon one's personal faith (or maybe lack of it), the love and support from family and friends, and the individual circumstances in which we find ourselves. We all hope that, in time, we are given the strength to deal with whatever is finally waiting for us...

'Fighting cancer' is an expression that does not sit easily with me. This is not to say that I do not get angry and depressed. I do, but I try to channel it in a positive way, recognising that in some ways I am fortunate in knowing the approximate timing of my departure. I am able to plan and prepare in the best way that I can for my partner, making the choices and decisions that I want to make for myself, as well as hopefully avoiding the curse of dementia, or worse.

In some ways, I am grateful for the clarity and understanding that an end-of-life situation can bring... A Quaker perspective is both positive and helpful, which has added clarity and meaning to my life.

Barrie Mahoney, 2022

28.62 Harrowing

The plow has savaged this sweet field
Misshapen clods of earth kicked up
Rocks and twisted roots exposed to view
Last year's growth demolished by the blade.

I have plowed my life this way
Turned over a whole history
Looking for the roots of what went wrong
Until my face is ravaged, furrowed, scarred.

Enough. The job is done.
Whatever's been uprooted, let it be
Seedbed for the growing that's to come
I plowed to unearth last year's reasons—

The farmer plows to plant a greening season.

Parker J Palmer, 1999

See also 15: Quaker approaches to death and dying and 27: Love and loss.

Part E:

Our Quaker story

Introduction

E.01 The Quaker way has grown from the experience and practice of early Friends. Quakers today are nurtured by the wisdom of our tradition and guided by our present experience of the Light Within. We can learn from the lives of Friends throughout our history as we discern how we are being called today.

E.02 The chapters in this part of the book reflect on how Quaker thought and practice have adapted to new discernment and new challenges over the history of our movement. They also look forward to new growing points in our faith and witness for the future.

Chapter 29 – Quaker history gives a summary of the history of the Quaker movement from its origins to modern times. It describes how the Quaker way has changed over time and how we have been led to develop the practices, structures and witness of Quakers in Britain today.

Chapter 30 – Our shared future explores our continuing guidance and discernment as a Quaker movement in Britain, and how we are being led to renew our communities and our practice.

Chapter 29:

Quaker history

29.01 New religious communities usually begin with an individual whose original or timely insights challenge and inspire others to a committed and renewed spiritual life... As more people respond to the Way opened to the founder, the group becomes larger and has to decide about how to organise itself, how to exercise authority, and how to relate to others outside the group. The development of Quakerism in seventeenth-century England was the story of one group who learnt to manage spirituality so that their founding charism remained powerful, ongoing and safe within a community context.

Janey O'Shea, 1993

Introduction

29.02 This chapter offers a brief overview of the origins and development of the radical religious movement that became known as Quakerism. It traces how early spiritual experience gave rise to the forms of worship, practice, organisation, and witness that are familiar to us today.

It describes how Quakers in Britain have lived out their faith in changing social conditions, and how Quaker thought and practice have adapted to new discernment and new circumstances. The history of Friends in other countries has differed in important ways, but Quakers everywhere trace their roots back to the movement's beginnings in seventeenth-century England.

This chapter includes:

- Background
- Foundational experiences
- A gathered people

- Early Friends' testimony
- Gospel order
- The Quietist period
- Slavery
- The nineteenth century
- Liberal Quakerism
- New Light
- A Quaker history timeline

For more on Friends in other countries, see 17: Quakers worldwide.

Background

29.03 The Quaker movement began in England in the 1650s, at a time of intense political, social and religious upheaval. It was also shaped by wider changes that had been transforming Europe for over a century.

The Protestant Reformation had confronted the Catholic Church over the nature of Christian faith, religious authority, and the relationship between church and state. Across Europe, various Protestant traditions had developed, with new interpretations of scripture and religious practice.

In England, Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1534 had established the Church of England, but many people believed the reform had not gone far enough. There were continuing challenges to the power of bishops, the role of clergy and the official form of worship.

New printed translations of the Bible into English and Welsh and growing literacy enabled many more people to read scripture for themselves. This led to a wide range of biblical interpretation, weakening the authority of the established church.

During the English Civil War of 1642–1651, state controls on printing broke down and many new groups were able to publish radical ideas about religious authority, worship and social organisation. The Quaker movement appeared at the centre of these new ideas.

Foundational experiences

29.04 I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings.

George Fox, 1647

29.05 George Fox was one of the foremost leaders of the early Quaker movement. In his early twenties, he travelled widely through the Midlands and northern England, searching for a more authentic experience of religion:

> I fasted much, and walked abroad in solitary places many days, and often took my Bible, and went and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places till night came on. And frequently in the night walked mournfully about by myself; for I was a man of sorrows in the times of the first workings of the Lord in me.

George Fox, 1647

29.06 In 1647, George Fox's despair was transformed by an overwhelming experience of Christ within:

> As I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ

> Jesus, that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus, when God doth work who shall let [hinder] it? And this I knew experimentally.
>
> George Fox, 1647

29.07 Through a series of powerful spiritual insights, which he called 'openings', George Fox came to a new understanding of Christian faith. He experienced a transforming encounter with Christ as an inward presence. This convinced him that true Christianity was not a set of beliefs but a lived reality that could be known and experienced by each person.

Fox had found a direct relationship with Christ as an Inward Light and guide. He understood this as Christ's return to earth, which had been promised in the gospels. Fox was called to announce to the world that 'Christ has come to teach his people himself' (as he often wrote). The Kingdom of God was now present and available to everyone who was willing to listen and follow this inward guidance.

See also 2: Quaker spiritual experience and 3: Quaker theology.

29.08 Another important early Quaker was Margaret Fell, who went on to marry George Fox in 1669. In 1652 Fox spoke at the church in Ulverston. This is part of Fell's account of the impact his words had on her:

> And then he went on, and opened the Scriptures, and said, 'The Scriptures were the prophets' words and Christ's and the apostles' words, and what as they spoke they enjoyed and possessed and had it from the Lord'. And said, 'Then what had any to do with the Scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth. You

will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this, but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light and hast walked in the Light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?'

This opened me so that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat me down in my pew again and cried bitterly. And I cried in my spirit to the Lord, 'We are all thieves, we are all thieves, we have taken the Scriptures in words and know nothing of them in ourselves'... I saw it was the truth, and I could not deny it; and I did as the apostle saith, I 'received the truth in the love of it'.

Margaret Fell, 1694

A gathered people

29.09 In 1652, George Fox travelled to Westmorland, in the north-west of England, where he met people who called themselves 'seekers'. They had left the organised churches and were meeting in silence to wait for a new revelation from God. They received Fox's message of the Inward Light of Christ with joy and became the nucleus of the original Quaker movement:

As we went I spied a great high hill called Pendle Hill, and I went on the top of it with much ado, it was so steep; but I was moved of the Lord to go atop of it; and when I came atop of it I saw Lancashire sea; and there atop of the hill I was moved to sound the day of the Lord; and the Lord let me see atop of the hill in what places he had a great people to be gathered.

George Fox, 1652

29.10 Thomas Camm recalled a meeting of the Westmorland Seekers at Preston Patrick in 1652:

Thither George Fox went, being accompanied with John Audland and John Camm. John Audland would have had George Fox to have gone into the place or pew where usually he or the preacher did sit,

but he refused, and took a back seat near the door, and John Camm sat down by him, where he sat silent waiting upon God about half an hour, in which time of silence Francis Howgill seemed uneasy, and pulled out his Bible and opened it, and stood up several times, sitting down again and closing his book, a dread and fear being upon him that he durst not begin to preach. After the said silence and waiting, George Fox stood up in the mighty power of God, and in the demonstration thereof was his mouth opened to preach Christ Jesus, the light of life and the way to God, and saviour of all that believe and obey him, which was delivered in that power and authority that most of the auditory, which were several hundreds, were effectually reached to the heart, and convinced of the Truth that very day, for it was the day of God's power. A notable day indeed never to be forgotten by me, Thomas Camm... I being then present at that meeting, a school boy but about 12 years of age.

Thomas Camm, 1652

29.11 Although George Fox is usually described as the founder of the Quaker movement, its rapid growth and survival depended on the work of many early leaders and ministers. From the beginning, Friends believed that all people – women and men, adults and children – could be led to proclaim the Inward Light in words and action.

Most of the first Quakers came from farming and artisan backgrounds, like most people of the time. Only a small number were from the educated or landowning classes, but some of them, such as Margaret Fell, Isaac Penington and William Penn, came to play important roles in the new movement.

29.12 Women ministers were seen as equal to men. They travelled widely, preached publicly and were often recognised as prophetic voices. Elizabeth Hooton was the first person known to be convinced by George Fox, and the group that met in her home called themselves 'children of the Light'. Margaret Fell was a key organiser, writer and protector of the movement. Her home at Swarthmoor Hall became an important meeting place and organising centre for the early Quaker community.

29.13 Many of these early ministers later became known as the Valiant Sixty. From 1654 they travelled across Britain, Ireland, Europe, and North America to spread the Quaker message through preaching and debate, often at great personal cost.

Their extensive travelling ministry spread Quaker ideas rapidly throughout these places, transforming a small, local movement into a national and international one. Many suffered physical attacks and imprisonment, including Sarah Cheevers and Katherine Evans, who were imprisoned by the Inquisition on Malta. Others were tortured or killed, including John Luffe and James Nayler.

29.14 In June 1659 William Robinson, Mary Dyer and Marmaduke Stevenson came into the colony of Massachusetts, where Quakers were to be banished on pain of death. The three were banished but returned and were condemned to death. The two men were hanged. Dyer was reprieved but again banished. She returned once more to spread the Quaker message in May 1660. This time there was no reprieve:

> Then Mary Dyer was brought forth, and with a band of soldiers led through the town, the drums being beaten before and behind her, and so continued that none might hear her speak all the way to the place of execution, which was about a mile. Thus guarded, she came to the gallows, and being gone up the ladder, some said to her, that, if she would return [home] she might come down and save her life. To which she replied, 'Nay, I cannot, for in obedience to the will of the Lord I came, and in His will I abide faithful to death'... Then one mentioned that she should have said, she had been in Paradise. To which she answered, 'Yea, I have been in Paradise these several days'... Thus Mary Dyer departed this life, a constant and faithful martyr of Christ, having been twice led to death, which the first time she expected with an entire resignation of mind to the will of God, and now suffered with Christian fortitude, being raised above the fear of death through a blessed hope and glorious assurance of eternal life and immortality.
>
> Joseph Besse, 1753

After Dyer's death a member of the General Court of Massachusetts is reputed to have made a comment that could be understood in two ways: 'She did hang as a flag for others to take example by.'

29.15 William Penn wrote of the first generation of Quakers:

> They were changed men themselves before they went about to change others. Their hearts were rent as well as their garments, and they knew the power and work of God upon them... And as they freely received what they had to say from the Lord, so they freely administered it to others. The bent and stress of their ministry was conversion to God, regeneration and holiness, not schemes of doctrines and verbal creeds or new forms of worship, but a leaving off in religion the superfluous and reducing the ceremonious and formal part, and pressing earnestly the substantial, the necessary and profitable part, as all upon a serious reflection must and do acknowledge.
>
> William Penn, 1694

For more on Quaker missionary activity, see 17: Quakers worldwide.

Early Friends in Scotland and Wales

29.16 Quaker meetings were held in Scotland from 1653, and in 1657 George Fox spent several months travelling through Dumfries, Douglas, Heads, Gartshore, Linithgow, Edinburgh, Leith, Glasgow, Stirling, Burntisland, and Dunbar. William Dewsbury, a prominent Yorkshire Quaker, visited Aberdeen in 1662 and drew many people to the new movement:

> The Quaker movement spread so rapidly after it first took root in the city that the ministers of Aberdeen began to be considerably alarmed at finding so many, both of the higher as well as lower classes, withdrawing from their communion. This led to the beginning of that prolonged and bitter persecution, surely one of the saddest in the religious life of the city. By calumnies and reproaches poured from the pulpits, the ministers endeavoured to incense the magistrates to

suppress the Quakers, and to raise among the ruder and less intelligent section of the people a spirit of indignation and vindictive abuse. Hence it was, we are told, that whenever any of the Quaker persuasion appeared in the streets they were received by the populace with stoning and beating, pulling of the hair, and other lawless abuses, which the magistrates, instead of reproving, too often countenanced.

Alexander Gammie, 1909

29.17 John ap John, known as 'the apostle of the Quakers in Wales', was a Puritan in the congregation of Morgan Llwyd in Wrexham. In 1653 he travelled to Swarthmoor Hall to meet George Fox and became a convinced Quaker. Returning to Wales, he established the first Quaker community at Pen-y-cefn. He travelled widely to carry the Quaker message across the country, including in a journey through north Wales with Fox in 1657. From the late 1660s he helped to organise and strengthen the Quaker movement in Wales, establishing regular meetings throughout the country.

Welsh Quakers faced severe persecution throughout this time. In 1681 several hundred Friends emigrated to the new Quaker colony of Pennsylvania.

Early Friends' testimony

29.18 Friends, keep at a word in all your dealings without oppression.
And keep to the sound language, thou to everyone.
And keep your testimony against the world's vain fashion.
And keep your testimony against the hireling priests, and their tithes, and maintenance.
And against the mass-houses, and the repairing of them.
And against the priest's and the world's joining in marriage.
And your testimony against swearing, and the world's corrupt manners.
And against all looseness, pleasures, and prophaneness whatsoever.
And against all the world's evil ways, vain worships, and religions, and to stand up for God's.

George Fox, 1668

29.19 Early Friends' testimony, their prophetic message to the world, was directed against religious ceremony and social hypocrisy. They believed the rest of Christianity was corrupt and only Quakers represented the power and simplicity of the early church, commonly describing their movement as 'primitive Christianity revived'. They insisted that faith must be experienced inwardly and expressed in lives of uncompromising integrity.

This conviction led them to reject the conventional forms of politeness that marked differences in social status. Friends objected to titles and gestures that upheld false distinctions between people. Instead, they addressed everyone equally, using the familiar 'thee' and 'thou' instead of the polite 'you'.

29.20 Thomas Ellwood, a young man from a wealthy background, described the moment when he first acknowledged becoming a Quaker:

> A knot of my old acquaintance [at Oxford], espying me, came to me. One of these was a scholar in his gown, another a surgeon of that city... When they were come up to me, they all saluted me, after the usual manner, putting off their hats and bowing, and saying, 'Your humble Servant, Sir', expecting no doubt the same from me. But when they saw me stand still, not moving my cap, nor bowing my knee... they were amazed, and looked first one upon another, then upon me, and then one upon another again for a while, without a word speaking. At length, the surgeon... clapping his hand in a familiar way upon my shoulder and smiling on me said, 'What, Tom, a Quaker!' To which I readily, and cheerfully answered, 'Yes, a Quaker.' And as the words passed out of my mouth I felt joy spring in my heart, for I rejoiced that I had not been drawn out by them into a compliance with them, and that I had strength and boldness given me to confess myself to be one of that despised people.
>
> Thomas Ellwood, 1659

29.21 Friends refused to use the conventional pagan-derived names for days of the week or months of the year – for example, referring to

Sunday as 'first day' and Monday as 'second day'. They also rejected the traditional Christian holy days, claiming that every day was equally sacred:

> To [George] Fox and the early Friends the whole of life seemed sacramental, and they refused to mark off any one particular practice or observance as more sacred than others. They took the same stand with regard to Sunday, or First Day; it was not in itself more holy than Saturday or Monday; every week-day should be a Lord's Day. Their whole attitude was gloriously positive, not negative. They were 'alive unto God' and sensed him everywhere.
>
> Gerald K Hibbert, 1941

29.22 Plain speech included refusing to swear the oaths that were demanded in court proceedings. In 1662 the Quaker Act introduced the requirement for subjects to swear an oath of allegiance to the king, making it a criminal offence to refuse to do so. Many Friends suffered imprisonment and confiscation of property for maintaining this testimony:

> They gave me the book [the Bible] to swear on, and the book saith, Swear not at all: But I told them, if they could prove that after Christ Jesus and his apostles had forbidden men to swear, they had allowed it, I would swear. Thus I said, and my allegiance lies in truth and faithfulness, not in swearing, and so should all your allegiance lie, if you did well. I do not deny swearing upon some account, and own it upon others, but I deny it, because Christ and the apostle have said, I should not swear at all.
>
> George Fox, 1665

29.23 Plainness and soberness of dress and behaviour were also an expression of Friends' testimony against vanity and superficiality. It was common at this time for radical Protestants to wear plain, dark-coloured clothes. Early Friends' clothing expressed their religious seriousness rather than a specific Quaker identity. Joan Vokins wrote to her children in 1686:

> Be careful and take heed that you do not stain the testimony of Truth that you have received, by wearing of needless things and following the world's fashions in your clothing and attire, but remember how I have bred you up.
>
> Joan Vokins, 1686

29.24 In 1700, Margaret Fell responded to a growing formalisation of Quaker plainness:

> We are now coming into that which Christ cried woe against, minding altogether outward things, neglecting the inward work of Almighty God in our hearts, if we can but frame according to outward prescriptions and orders, and deny eating and drinking with our neighbours, in so much that poor Friends is mangled in their minds, that they know not what to do, for one Friend says one way, and another another, but Christ Jesus saith, that we must take no thought what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or what we shall put on, but bids us consider the lilies how they grow, in more royalty than Solomon. But contrary to this, we must look at no colours, nor make anything that is changeable colours as the hills are, nor sell them, nor wear them: but we must be all in one dress and one colour: this is a silly poor Gospel. It is more fit for us, to be covered with God's Eternal Spirit, and clothed with his Eternal Light, which leads us and guides us into righteousness. Now I have set before you life and death, and desire you to choose life, and God and his truth.
>
> Margaret Fell, 1700

29.25 A famous, although probably mythical, story sheds light on early Friends' approach to testimony:

> When William Penn was convinced of the principles of Friends, and became a frequent attendant at their meetings, he did not immediately relinquish his gay apparel; it is even said that he wore a sword, as was then customary among men of rank and fashion.

> Being one day in company with George Fox, he asked his advice concerning it... George Fox answered, 'I advise thee to wear it as long as thou canst.' Not long after this they met again, when William had no sword, and George said to him, 'William, where is thy sword?' 'Oh!' said he, 'I have taken thy advice; I wore it as long as I could.'
>
> Samuel Janney, 1852

For more on testimony and how it has changed over time, see 5: Quaker testimony.

Gospel order

29.26 When the English monarchy was restored in 1660, the new government tried to enforce conformity to the Church of England as the only permitted form of worship. Non-conforming religious groups, including Quakers, faced severe persecution. Friends were imprisoned for attending Quaker meetings and for refusing to pay church tithes or swear oaths in court. More than 15,000 Quakers were imprisoned. At least 450 died in prison before the law was changed in 1689 to allow limited freedom of worship.

The Quaker movement survived because of Friends' determination to continue meeting and worshipping in defiance of oppressive laws, and to support each other through imprisonment and confiscation of property.

29.27 Persecution made it clear that Quakers needed strong internal organisation to foster mutual support, to care for the families of imprisoned Friends, and to maintain unity and discipline. As a result, the movement changed from the radical spontaneity of the earliest years towards greater discipline and order. A structured system of monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings was established, with responsibility for spiritual care, decision-making and mutual accountability. Elders were appointed and careful records were kept. This pattern, known as gospel order, became the foundation of Quaker organisation by the late seventeenth century.

Yearly meetings representing all monthly meetings began to be held annually in London from 1686. In 1673, the Second Day Morning meeting ('Second Day' meaning Monday) was established to decide what could be published in the name of Friends and to correspond with Quakers in the American colonies and elsewhere. In 1675 a Meeting for Sufferings was set up to petition government on behalf of persecuted Friends and to advocate for legal changes.

These structures were largely dominated and run by men, in spite of the ideal of equality. After 1675, Margaret Fell and George Fox instituted a system of separate women's business meetings so that women could play an active part in decision-making. Some meeting houses had shuttered partitions or galleries that allowed the space to be divided for business meetings and shared for worship. The topics that came before the men's and women's business meetings were highly gendered. Women tended to take on pastoral responsibilities, such as poor relief, while men looked after money, property and doctrine.

For more on our current understanding of gospel order, see 12: Quaker meeting structures in Britain.

The Quietist period

29.28 By the early eighteenth century, legal persecution of Quakers had largely ended. Friends were no longer a growing radical movement but a small, recognised religious group within British society. It was during this time that the name Society of Friends came into common use, probably developed from earlier expressions such as 'Friends of the Light' and 'Friends of Truth'. This century is often described as the 'Quietist period' of Quaker history.

Quietist spirituality

29.29 Quietism is a type of spirituality that focuses on inward stillness, humility and faithful obedience to God's guidance. During the eighteenth century, Friends came to place a strong emphasis on purity of life and

faithfulness to traditional Quaker practices while also becoming more involved in wider society. In meetings for worship, vocal ministry became less frequent and more restrained.

29.30 From 1722, Friends who were recognised as having a religious calling to ministry could be formally 'recorded' by their monthly meeting. Recording was a way of acknowledging and supporting the spiritual gift of ministry. It entailed weighty responsibility for developing a person's gift through a disciplined prayer life, study and sound behaviour.

Travelling ministers played an important role in keeping the Quaker community united. They visited meetings throughout Britain and overseas, often with an accompanying elder, to bring spiritual encouragement and challenge to local Friends. All Friends were also encouraged to set aside times for regular silent prayer, or 'inward retirement'.

29.31 Catherine Phillips was a Quaker minister from Dudley in Worcestershire who travelled widely in the ministry. Her letters express a deep quietist spirituality in the distinctive language of this period:

> My sincere and earnest desire is... that I may constantly centre in my own littleness, yea nothingness: for indeed in my flesh dwelleth no good thing. All good, and the power of shewing it forth, is of and from its own Divine source. Who are great, but those whom the Lord sees meet to dignify? All is the effect of his wisdom, power, and mercy: therefore to him be the praise, saith my soul; and may I ever humbly confess before him, that I am nothing, nor can do any thing, but as he puts me forth.
>
> Catherine Phillips, 1798

Discipline and testimony

29.32 During the eighteenth century, Quakers became more concerned with preserving the faithfulness of the existing community than the convincement of the world's people. Strong boundaries were drawn

around membership, including strict expectations about conduct and marriage. Friends were only allowed to marry other Quakers and were disowned for 'marrying out'. As a result, Quaker numbers declined steadily throughout the eighteenth century.

The original testimony of plainness became more clearly defined and regulated, with explicit guidance on dress, furnishings and personal appearance. Friends were expected to avoid fashionable clothing, bright colours and decorative detail. Men commonly wore broad-brimmed hats and simple coats, and women wore plain dresses and bonnets. Plain dress was a visible expression of a commitment to plainness and humility. It was understood as a spiritual discipline that helped to keep attention focused on inward faithfulness rather than outward display.

29.33 All of the arts, including music, theatre and literature, were strongly discouraged during the Quietist period, as they were thought to encourage immorality and distract Friends from their serious spiritual calling:

> It might seem perverse of Friends to take these attitudes, but they did not do so out of a misplaced sense of self-denial or a shallow philistinism. They did not object to singing as such, but thought that what you sang affected you by stirring up your emotions. Since the contemporary repertoire contained many old favourites concerned with the adventures and misadventures of love, feats of arms, alcoholic conviviality or the exhilarations of the field… they quite reasonably concluded that such things were unsuitable for Friends.
>
> John Punshon, 1984

Slavery

29.34 During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, some Quakers were directly involved in the slave trade as investors, ship owners, captains, iron masters, or merchants. Enslaved people were bought by Quakers, traded by Quaker merchants and forced to work on Quaker-owned plantations. For many early Friends, slavery was accepted as part of the economic and social order of the time.

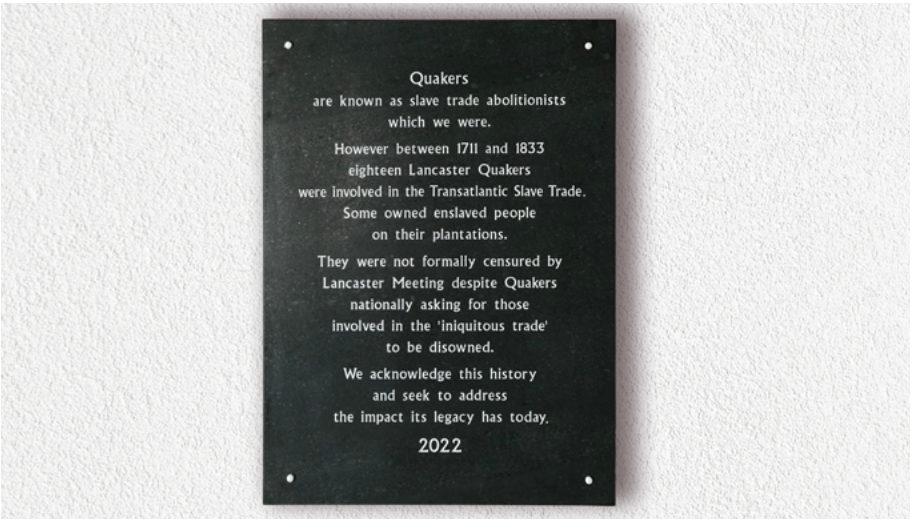
George Fox encountered slavery on a visit to Barbados in 1671. He advised Friends to 'deal mildly and gently' with their slaves and that 'after certain years of servitude they should make them free', but he did not condemn slave ownership or trading in enslaved people.

29.35 Margaret Fell's son-in-law John Rous was joint owner of a large sugar plantation in Barbados, which by 1680 held over three hundred people in slavery.

John was an important part of the Fell family and a weighty Friend. There are letters in the Swarthmore Documents describing his sending sugar and Barbados oranges up to Swarthmoor Hall. He travelled with George Fox to Barbados in 1671, and they stayed on John's plantation. John also contributed significantly to his local meeting, donating £30 towards the building of the meeting house (the equivalent of a year's wages for a skilled tradesman).

John was known to advocate for kind treatment of enslaved people, but he doesn't appear to have made any moves to free those on his plantation. He died on a voyage home from Barbados in 1695.

Plaque erected on Lancaster meeting house, 2022



29.36 Quakers are known as slave trade abolitionists which we were.

> However between 1711 and 1833 eighteen Lancaster Quakers were involved in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Some owned enslaved people on their plantations.
>
> They were not formally censured by Lancaster Meeting despite Quakers nationally asking for those involved in the 'iniquitous trade' to be disowned.
>
> We acknowledge this history and seek to address the impact its legacy has today.
>
> Plaque in Lancaster Quaker Meeting House, 2022

29.37 During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, individual Friends such as William Edmundson, John Woolman and Benjamin Lay began to challenge Quakers' involvement in slavery:

> Where a trade is carried on, productive of much misery, and they who suffer by it are some thousand miles off, the danger is the greater of not laying their sufferings to heart.
>
> In procuring slaves on the coast of Africa, many children are stolen privately; wars also are encouraged amongst the negroes, but all is at a great distance.
>
> Many groans arise from dying men, which we hear not.
>
> Many cries are uttered by widows and fatherless children, which reach not our ears.
>
> Many cheeks are wet with tears, and faces sad with unutterable grief, which we see not.
>
> Cruel tyranny is encouraged. The hands of robbers are strengthened, and thousands reduced to the most abject slavery, who never injured us...

> What pious man could be a witness to these things, and see a trade carried on in this manner, without being deeply affected with sorrow?
>
> John Woolman, 1773

29.38 In 1727, London Yearly Meeting formally minuted its disapproval of Friends dealing in enslaved people. By the end of the century, most Quaker meetings condemned both slavery and the slave trade, required members to free enslaved people, and had largely disowned those who refused. Many Friends benefited financially from their involvement in enslavement and trafficking, but others sought to avoid the products of slavery and organised boycotts of sugar from slave plantations.

In the nineteenth century, Quakers became leaders in the wider abolitionist movement. They helped to found national campaigning organisations, mobilised public opinion through petitions and publications, and pressed Parliament to abolish the slave trade and slave ownership.

29.39 London Yearly Meeting 1822 accepted 'An address to the inhabitants of Europe on the iniquities of the slave trade, issued by the Religious Society of Friends':

> The arguments of the Christian, like the religion from which they are derived, are plain and simple, but they are in themselves invincible. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is a system of peace, of love, of mercy, and of good-will. The slave trade is a system of fraud and rapine, of violence and cruelty… That which is morally wrong cannot be politically right.
>
> London Yearly Meeting, 1822

The nineteenth century

29.40 During the nineteenth century, industrialisation, social change and evangelical Christianity brought profound changes to British society and to the Society of Friends.

Many Friends in the nineteenth century were strongly influenced by the new broader Protestant evangelical movement, with its focus on biblical authority, Christ's atonement and organised evangelism. This led to internal conflicts between Quaker evangelicals and traditionalists, and many Friends left to join other churches. However, London Yearly Meeting avoided the permanent splits that divided Quakers in North America.

For more on Friends in other countries, see 17: Quakers worldwide.

29.41 The traditional Quaker discipline was relaxed during this century. From 1859 Friends were allowed to marry those outside the Society, which helped to stabilise the declining membership. Many Friends no longer wore distinctive clothes or used plain speech, and in 1861 these became optional. Observing traditional testimonies of dress and behaviour, or 'going plain', became a sign of particular religious seriousness rather than being expected of all Friends. Music and the arts gradually became more widely practised and accepted. Additionally, from 1850, gravestones were permitted for the first time, provided they were simple and uniform in size and height. Previously, Friends had opposed them as symbols of vanity and social hierarchy.

29.42 Until the mid-nineteenth century, Quakers were still excluded from Oxford and Cambridge universities and from some professions, which had encouraged many to pursue careers in business, engineering and finance.

Additionally, strict rules against marrying outside the Society had created a close-knit community with strong mutual support. Quakers' reputation for trustworthiness, and close commercial and financial links between Quaker families, enabled some of them to make large fortunes in textiles, ironmaking, confectionery, shoemaking, and banking.

Many Quaker employers saw business as a form of stewardship and aimed to express their faith through good business and employment practice. They introduced shorter working hours, pensions, education, medical care, and improved housing for their employees, including innovative model villages such as Bournville.

Most Quaker employers at this time were uneasy about trade unions and suspicious of socialism. They favoured gradual reform through philanthropy and moral example, and workers in their firms rarely shared in decision-making.

Evangelism and social reform

29.43 During this century, Quakers became much more engaged in social issues and political campaigning. As well as playing a leading role in the anti-slavery movement, Friends were active in a wide range of programmes for social improvement, including adult education, missionary work, famine relief, prison reform, and temperance.

Large numbers of Quaker adult schools were set up, with a particular focus on providing a basic education for working-class men and women who had missed out on schooling as children. Adult schools encouraged temperance and Bible-reading, and included savings and insurance schemes to promote self-help and mutual aid.

The popularity of adult schools led to a widespread Quaker-inspired movement of Sunday evening 'mission meetings', with hymns, talks and scripture readings. By 1875 there were as many members of mission meetings as Friends, although Quaker meetings generally failed to welcome these working-class newcomers into membership.

29.44 The Friends Foreign Mission Association carried out missionary work in China, India, Madagascar, and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). Evangelism was also promoted within Britain through the Friends Home Mission Committee. This initiative sent paid mission workers to revive small Quaker meetings by preaching, leading services, and setting up Sunday schools and temperance societies.

During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, Quaker relief workers provided food, clothing and medical aid to civilians in active war zones in France and Germany. This work was coordinated through the newly formed Friends War Victims Relief Committee, which became a lasting model for later Quaker humanitarian programmes.

29.45 Elizabeth Fry championed prison reform and founded Britain's first national women's organisation, the British Ladies' Society for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners, in 1821. Fry promoted sanitation, education, meaningful work, and respectful treatment for people in prison, with a particular concern for women. Her work helped to influence public attitudes and bring about legal changes, including separation of prisoners by age and offence, and the employment of women warders for women in prison.

In 1818, Elizabeth Dudley described a visit to Newgate Prison, where Elizabeth Fry had begun her prison ministry in 1813:

> In the evening Martha Savory, my mother and I went to Newgate where we met Elizabeth Fry, Peter Bedford and Edward Harris. We saw about fifteen poor men under sentence of death, who soon collected round us and stood with the most becoming and quiet attention, whilst my mother was engaged to preach the gospel of reconciliation... The two especially who had but a few hours to live, were encouraged to cast themselves upon the mercy and forgiveness of an all-gracious God whose power and goodness are the same as when they were manifested to the thief upon the cross... They wept freely, and though not able to say much, we fully believe they felt. It was difficult to tear ourselves from such a scene, and we turned from these poor sufferers under the feeling of indignant repugnance to the sanguinary nature of those laws which put so little value upon human life, and adjudge punishments so disproportioned to and so unlikely to prevent the renewal of crimes.
>
> Elizabeth Dudley, 1818

29.46 Quakers at this time were also strongly committed to the temperance movement, which aimed to reduce the social harm caused by alcohol. Friends were concerned with the effects of excessive drinking on health, family life and poverty, particularly for working-class people in the rapidly growing industrial towns. Quaker firms such as Cadbury's, Fry's and Rowntree's marketed cocoa as a healthier alternative to alcohol, especially for working people.

Liberal Quakerism

29.47 By the 1880s, new advances in science, the theory of evolution and historical study of the Bible had led many Friends to question traditional assumptions about scripture.

This contributed to a movement of renewal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that became known as the Quaker Renaissance. Influenced by Friends such as John Wilhelm Rowntree, Edward Grubb, Rufus Jones, and Matilda Sturge, many younger Friends moved away from evangelicalism towards a more liberal Christian outlook. They promoted a mystical understanding of Quaker spirituality, engagement with modern science, biblical criticism, and a strong commitment to social action.

Organisational change accompanied this renewal. Women were admitted to Meeting for Sufferings in 1896, and the first fully united yearly meeting was held in 1909. In 1924, London Yearly Meeting ended the practice of recording ministers, responding to concerns that it discouraged wider participation in ministry. This led to changes in worship practice, including more equal seating and in some places a move from benches to a circle of chairs with a central table.

War resistance and reconciliation

29.48 During World War I, many Friends became conscientious objectors, often enduring imprisonment and public hostility for their witness against war and compulsory military service. At the outbreak of war, a group of Quakers organised by Philip Noel-Baker established the Friends Ambulance Unit to provide medical aid and transport in war zones. This enabled many Friends to offer wartime service without directly participating in the fighting.

After the war, the civilian population of Germany suffered severe hunger. In 1920, Quakers from Britain and the United States organised a major feeding programme for German children. This provoked public hostility in Britain, including accusations that Quakers were 'Hun-lovers'.

29.49 Every day in school up to a million German children received a warm meal and some bread and milk. This saved them from undernourishment, illness and death. *Quäkerspeisung* – 'Quaker food' – became an established expression in Germany. The shipping label for the school food bore the following note: 'To the children of Germany! A friendly greeting brought to you from the Religious Society of Friends, which for 250 years, and even during the recently ended World War, has adhered to the principle that only love and the desire to help, rather than war and violence, can bring peace and happiness to humanity.'

Henning Mielke, 2010

29.50 In 1933, London Yearly Meeting set up the Germany Emergency Committee to support Jews and others suffering Nazi persecution. In 1938, it worked with the Jewish community in Britain to coordinate the Kindertransport, which brought nearly 10,000 children from Germany and Austria to safety in Britain. Individual Friends and Quaker meetings provided funds, foster homes and practical support for around 2,000 of these children.

During World War II, the Friends Ambulance Unit was re-established and operated in Europe, North Africa and Asia. Quakers were also involved in civil defence, hospital work and refugee support.

In the aftermath of the war, British Quakers played a leading role in reconciliation and reconstruction in Germany and Austria. Friends advocated for humane treatment of former enemies and were involved in providing relief for displaced people, distributing food, rebuilding homes, and supporting refugees and prisoners of war. Quaker centres were established in Germany to support dialogue, youth work and democratic education, laying foundations for long-term reconciliation. British and American Friends' relief organisations were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.

29.51 Quaker humanitarian work also expanded into what would later be called overseas development. Friends were active in Africa, Asia and Europe, responding to famine, displacement and poverty. Quaker organisations

such as the Friends Service Council (now Quaker Peace & Social Witness) coordinated this work, often in partnership with international bodies.

Individual Friends and Quaker organisations also worked in conflict resolution and international diplomacy, including mediation efforts in India during the transition to independence. Others contributed to the development of international institutions and non-governmental organisations committed to peace and human rights, such as the Quaker United Nations Office and the Quaker Council for European Affairs.

The growth of the peace movement and widespread opposition to nuclear weapons from the 1960s to the 1980s brought many newcomers to the Quaker movement, and a growing focus on peace activism. By the end of the century, most Friends in Britain had joined as adults, rather than being born into Quaker families as in the previous two centuries.

See also 22: Our peace testimony.

Liberal spirituality

29.52 Towards the end of the twentieth century, British Quaker spirituality became increasingly diverse, as secularism and religious pluralism in the wider society were reflected in the beliefs of Friends.

While Christian belief and language remained central for many Friends, others began to draw insight from a wide range of sources, including other religious traditions, philosophy, psychology, and science. Unity was maintained through shared practices of worship and collective discernment, rather than shared religious language.

Friends increasingly emphasised that people encounter the divine through many different traditions, life experiences and forms of belief. In the early twenty-first century, nontheist approaches also became more recognised among Quakers. This reflected the experience of many Friends whose spirituality did not fit easily within traditional religious frameworks.

For more on spiritual diversity among Friends today, see 3: Quaker theology.

Organisation

29.53 During the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the structures of Quakers in Britain were reshaped to respond to changing needs. Quarterly meetings were replaced by general meetings in 1965, increasing the role of Meeting for Sufferings as the standing representative body between sessions of London Yearly Meeting. In 2005 most general meetings ceased as formal parts of the structure of Quakers in Britain, and in 2007 preparative and monthly meetings were renamed as local and area meetings. Changes to charity law in 2006 led to the formal registration of area meetings as charities and the creation of a new trustee body for the centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting. In 2024 Friends decided to replace Meeting for Sufferings with several Yearly Meeting sessions each year from 2026.

For more on current Quaker structures, see 12: Quaker meeting structures in Britain.

New Light

29.54 The history of the Quaker movement is one of constant change and renewal. Through dramatic social changes, we have tried to faithfully adapt our thought and practice as new Light is given. Often, we have fallen short. At times Friends have been willing to sacrifice integrity to self-interest, to nurture our own self-righteousness, or to bend the life of the Spirit to the fashions of the age. Whatever our limitations, we can draw hope and encouragement from the constant presence of the Spirit, which is still available to guide and transform us.

29.55 After three hundred years we may be justified in taking an optimistic view of the achievements and resilience of the Quaker Way, and the success with which it has lived out its prophetic and conserving roles. However, to live the Quaker Way faithfully in our own time and land is not to try to repeat what early Friends were called to do, or to cling to whatever Quaker forms we have inherited in this Yearly Meeting. What we share with Friends who have gone before us is a task and

some fine tools. Our task is to inaugurate the Way of God in this time and in this land; our tools are our personal experience of the Light Within, and our corporate experience in using collective guidance to discover and enact God's will in the world. To do this we must not become more like early Friends, but more like ourselves as we are in the eye of God.

Janey O'Shea, 1993

See also 2: Quaker spiritual experience, 3: Quaker theology and 19: Spiritual roots of Quaker witness.

A Quaker history timeline

29.56 The following timeline shows a history of Quakers in Britain.

Year	Event
1624	George Fox is born.
1642	English Civil War begins.
1647	George Fox meets Elizabeth Hooton. Fox experiences his opening that 'there is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition'.
1649	Charles I is executed. Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans govern England.
1650	George Fox is imprisoned for 12 months in Derby, refusing freedom after 6 months if he joined the army. He is nicknamed a 'Quaker' by the sentencing judge.
1651	George Fox meets with Richard Farnworth, Thomas Aldam, James Nayler, William Dewsbury, and others in Yorkshire.
1652	George Fox has a vision on Pendle Hill of a great people to be gathered. A Quaker awakening in north-west England is followed by a mission to the rest of England and Ireland.
1653	John ap John visits George Fox at Swarthmoor Hall. The first Quaker meeting is established in Wales.
1654	The Valiant Sixty begin missionary activity.
1656	James Nayler enters Bristol and is tried by Parliament. The first Quakers arrive in North America. Other Friends travel to the Vatican and Constantinople (now Istanbul).

1657	George Fox travels through Scotland and north Wales.
1658	Oliver Cromwell dies.
1660	James Nayler dies. Charles II is restored.
1662	The Quaker Act forbids Quakers to meet for worship.
1666	Margaret Fell's *Women's speaking justified* is published.
1668	London Yearly Meeting is established.
1670	Trial of William Penn and William Mead establishes rights of juries in England.
1671–1673	George Fox encourages women's meetings before travelling to America.
1675	Meeting for Sufferings is organised in London.
1689	Act of Toleration permits freedom of worship for Protestant dissenters.
1690	Quakers establish their first banks.
1691	George Fox dies.
1694	George Fox's *Journal* is published.
1695	The Affirmation Act allows Quakers to affirm in court instead of taking an oath.
1698	George Fox's *Epistles* is published.
1702	Margaret Fell dies.
1722	Recording of Quaker ministers is introduced in Britain.
1737	Quaker meetings introduce formal membership lists.
1739	Methodist revival begins in England, start of the evangelical Great Awakening.
1786	North Britain Half Years Meeting established, renamed Scotland General Meeting in 1807.
1792	Quakers from New England emigrate to Wales and establish the town of Milford Haven.
1796	York Retreat, the first modern mental health hospital, is founded by Friends in Britain.
1813	Elizabeth Fry begins prison reform work at Newgate Prison.
1816	First peace society in Britain is founded by William Allen and Joseph T Price.
1846–1847	Quakers provide famine relief in Ireland.
1847	Adult school and home mission movements are established in Britain.
1852	Friends Temperance Union is formed in Britain.

1859	Prohibition against marrying out is discontinued in Britain.
1865	Provisional Committee of Foreign Gospel Service, later the Friends Foreign Mission Association, is started in England.
1881	Friends Home Mission Committee is recognised by London Yearly Meeting.
1870–1871	British Quakers carry out relief work in the Franco-Prussian War.
1895	Manchester Conference is followed by summer schools, leading to the opening of Woodbrooke College in 1903.
1909	First fully united men's and women's London Yearly Meeting is held.
1914	British Friends establish the War Victims Relief Committee and the Friends Ambulance Unit.
1920–1924	Friends undertake a feeding programme for German children, later expanded to Poland, Russia and other European countries.
1920	All Friends Conference is held in London.
1926	British Friends Service Committee is established.
1937	Second World Conference of Friends is held in Pennsylvania. Friends World Committee for Consultation is founded.
1938	Kindertransport evacuates nearly 10,000 children to Britain.
1939–1946	Quakers provide war relief in Europe and Asia.
1947	Nobel Peace Prize is award to the American Friends Service Committee and the Friends Service Council on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends.
1952	Third World Conference of Friends is held in Oxford, England.
1967	Fourth World Conference of Friends is held in Greensboro, North Carolina, United States.
1985	First World Gathering of Young Friends is held at Greensboro, North Carolina, United States.
1990	First International Theological Conference of Quaker Women is held at Woodbrooke College, England.
1991	Fifth World Conference of Friends is held in Honduras, Kenya, and the Netherlands.
1992	Meeting for Friends in Wales is established, now called Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales.

1995	London Yearly Meeting changes its name to Britain Yearly Meeting.
2005	Second World Gathering of Young Friends is held at Lancaster, England, and Mombasa, Kenya.
2009	Britain Yearly Meeting recognises same-sex Quaker marriage.
2011	Britain Yearly Meeting makes the Canterbury Commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community.
2012	Sixth World Plenary Meeting of Friends is held in Nakuru, Kenya. The Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice is published.
2016	Seventh World Plenary Meeting of Friends is held in Písac, Peru.
2021	Britain Yearly Meeting makes a commitment to become an actively anti-racist faith community and to affirm trans and non-binary people.
2022	Britain Yearly Meeting commits to making reparations for slavery, colonialism and economic exploitation.
2024	Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales is formed. The Eighth World Conference of Friends is held in Johannesburg, South Africa.
2025	Quakers in Scotland is established.

Chapter 30:

Our shared future

30.01 The first step, if we want to change the world, is to refuse to accept things as they are. So if we want to build the future of Quakerism, we have to refuse to accept it as it is. We need to step up, let go, listen to our guide, tell our stories of how being a Quaker has transformed us, and get on with being God's faithful Quakers in the world.

Paul Parker, 2024

Introduction

30.02 Quakers in Britain are facing turbulent times. Alongside others, at home and throughout the world, we live in the shadow of climate breakdown, political crisis and technological disruption. For many, looking to the future is frightening.

The Quaker movement was born in a time of violent social upheaval, and each era of our history has brought new crises and conflicts. Through long experience, Friends have found that the Quaker way can be relied on in a world turned upside down. Our worship, discernment and community can support us to thrive and to offer our gifts for the healing of the world.

In 2015, Meeting for Sufferings discerned a vision for Quakers in Britain called 'Our faith in the future'. It describes our hopes and intentions for the community of Friends, based on six themes of the contemporary Quaker way. This chapter includes reflections on each of these themes and an additional seventh theme:

- Meeting for worship
- Loving, inclusive Quaker communities

- Quaker discipline
- Living our testimony
- Working with others
- Reaching out
- Seeds of renewal

For more on how Quakers have responded to social change, see 29: Quaker history. For more on the discerned vision for Quakers in Britain, see the Resources.

Meeting for worship

30.03 Facing turbulent times, Quakers in Britain seek a future where meeting for worship is the bedrock of living as a Quaker.

In worship we become one with the Spirit, with each other and with our true selves. The Spirit is the source of strength and guidance for all we are and do. Our way of worship is open to all, and we are making it more widely known.

Wrth wynebu cyfnod cythryblus, mae'r Crynwyr ym Mhrydain yn ceisio dyfodol pan fo'r cyfarfod addoli yn sylfaen i fyw fel Crynwyr.

Wrth addoli, down yn un â'r Ysbryd, â'n gilydd, ac â'n hunain gwirioneddol. Yr Ysbryd yw ffynhonnell y cryfder a'r arweiniad ar gyfer popeth ydym a phopeth a wnawn. Mae ein ffordd o addoli yn agored i bawb, ac fe'i gwnawn yn fwy hysbys.

Our faith in the future / Ein ffydd yn y dyfodol, 2015

30.04 Meeting for worship is the foundation of the Quaker way. It has sustained Friends through centuries of conflict, persecution and upheaval. We can be confident that this way of worship will continue to draw Friends and seekers to the living fire of the Spirit. Even when we feel

unsure about how to worship, the Spirit is always present to lead us in new directions and towards new ways of seeing the world.

30.05 99% of the time I don't feel anything, I'm just there. But I go because that 1% of the time changes the way I see the world. I go because of the spiritual connection; I don't know what with yet but I know it's there.

Fynn Park, 2024

30.06 Meeting for worship is always an adventure – no-one knows what will happen or where it will lead, but I think one needs to be prepared to be led, ready for the journey (with heart and mind) and accepting of the challenges encountered.

Anonymous, 1997

30.07 I wonder if we really know how dangerous meeting for worship really is... Making ourselves open to the workings of the spirit... may lead us in directions we never dreamed of.

Helen Steven, 2005

30.08 As we have encountered the Presence in this meeting house, like many Friends before us, we have witnessed the thread of Living Fire that runs from the prophets to the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ at Pentecost to the early Friends who found Jesus living in their hearts. That Fire has not gone out. It will not go out. We young adult Friends seek to know this Fire for ourselves, in our time. We have found it roaring here. This gives us hope for the future of our Religious Society. We have gathered around this Fire in worship, and we plan to leave it burning.

Oxford Young Adult Friends Gathering, 2025

See also 1: Quaker worship.

Loving, inclusive Quaker communities

30.09 Facing turbulent times, Quakers in Britain seek a future where Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age.

> All are heard, valued and supported both in our needs and our leadings. Everyone's contribution is accepted according to their gifts and resources. All are welcomed and included. There are clear and effective ways of working together on shared concerns. Fellowship and fun strengthen the bonds between us, enhancing a loving community.
>
> Wrth wynebu cyfnod cythryblus, mae'r Crynwyr ym Mhrydain yn ceisio dyfodol pan fo cymunedau'r Crynwyr yn gariadus, yn gynhwysol ac yn agored i bawb o bob oed.
>
> Caiff pawb eu clywed, eu gwerthfawrogi a'u cefnogi yn eu hanghenion a'u harweiniad ysbrydol. Caiff cyfraniad pawb ei dderbyn yn unol â'u hadnoddau. Caiff pawb eu croesawu a'u cynnwys. Y mae ffyrdd clir ac effeithiol i gydweithio ar feysydd sydd o bwys cyffredin. Mae cyfeillgarwch a hwyl yn cryfhau'r cwlwm rhyngom, ac yn cyfoethogi cymuned gariadus.
>
> *Our faith in the future / Ein ffydd yn y dyfodol*, 2015

30.10 The answer to ecological crisis, injustice and violence is community. In Quaker communities we can find a place of acceptance that shows us what life can be. We can accompany each other across the generations, nurturing hope and resilience. As we raise each other up, we can work together to restore our world.

30.11 Community is not an optional extra to our faith but is essential to it. Some of us are lucky enough to have been part of a community of Young Friends that nourished us when all else in the world did not fit. We had the feeling of 'this is what life could be'. We are called to make it so, to accompany one another across the generations, delighting in the gifts of all.

> Minute 22, Britain Yearly Meeting, 2022

30.12 I think God shapes us into the people that God needs us to be, especially if we're willing, and I think God often does this through community. I walked into my first Quaker meeting in 2009... The Quakers I met saw something in me. They nurtured me. They listened to me...

I did not understand why any group of people would invest in me the way Friends were doing. I had never known a community in which mutual support and nurture was an understood primary purpose of the group. It was hard to trust that the experience I was having was real.

Later, as I understood the Quaker perspective on community, I discovered that we encourage individuals and give them opportunities because we know we were created to be mutually dependent. The entire community benefits when one person reaches their potential. Everything we do is about the community. We don't always do it perfectly – but that's the intention, and it's why we work so hard to raise people up.

Emily Provance, 2025

30.13 I walked from spiritual drought and a busy, hurried and harried life into a sea of silence and stillness. The Light shone through the door on those gathered people and silence was like a balm to my ruffled nerves and soul. The warm embrace of acceptance, just as I was, was moving and magnetic. I made a decision to stay and search deeper. Who were these people? They shared their space, their tea, their lives and their God – that calls us to be one in the same body. They broke bread with me as never before. I stayed! I was accepted, affirmed, and that enabled me to accept that there was that of God in me, despite what I had been led to believe. 'Umuntu ugumuntu ngabantu' – a person is human through the humanity of others. I found my humanity and humanness through those Friends who saw that of God in me and affirmed that.

Duduzile Mtshazo, 2007

30.14 Humans are meant to live in community – therein lies whatever glimmer of hope, no matter how small, that we can face this somehow. Community is where we can tackle the immensity of desperation and challenge and danger. The impending famine, wars, migrations, and the billions of people displaced from scorching hot hometowns where food can no longer grow.

A tiny group of people – the only thing that has ever changed the world – is regenerating abandoned terraced land in the Alps of north-west Italy... Bringing an abandoned hamlet back to life is also a powerful symbol. We're going back to a lifestyle of simplicity freely chosen. This is a counter-exodus as opposed to the one driven by industrialisation, or all the brainwashing which drove people to the lowlands and cities in search of comfort, using resources taken away from the Global South and destroying the planet (and the commons) in the process.

We're enthused by the huge challenge. United in love.

Marco Bertaglia, 2023

30.15 Postcard to a child for the future

Hello love, I came across this Jewish blessing and I'm sharing it with you. It goes like this:

'Blessed are You oh Lord our God, king of the universe, Who makes created things different.'

You've always been wonderfully different. You'll survive those who see difference but don't value the diversity of creation. You'll grow in all ways and never be a replica of anyone. In the meetings of Friends which you've known since infancy there's space to grow in spirit, if you want to, and people to learn from who aren't rash in judgement. If you'll let them, they will be your friends.

Towards the source, 2014

See also 6: The meaning of Quaker community and 7: Diversity and inclusion in Quaker communities.

Quaker discipline

30.16 Facing turbulent times, Quakers in Britain seek a future where all Friends understand and live by Quaker discipline.

Our discipline is actually 'Letting go and letting God': not 'Thou shalt' nor 'I will' but 'What does Love require of us?' It works when we understand it and practise it. Because we understand it, we can share it with others. Our testimony guides us, but we have to work on what it means for each of us personally.

Wrth wynebu cyfnod cythryblus, mae'r Crynwyr ym Mhrydain yn ceisio dyfodol pan fo pob Cyfaill yn deall ac yn byw yn ôl disgyblaeth y Crynwyr.

Mewn gwirionedd, ein disgyblaeth yw 'Gollwng gafael a gadael i Dduw': nid 'Na wna' na 'Byddaf yn', ond 'Beth mae Cariad yn gofyn ohonom?' Mae'n gweithio pan fyddwn yn ei ddeall ac yn ei arfer. Am ein bod yn ei ddeall, gallwn ei rannu ag eraill. Cawn ein harwain gan ein tystiolaeth, ond rhaid i ni ystyried yr hyn a olyga i bob un ohonom yn bersonol.

Our faith in the future / Ein ffydd yn y dyfodol, 2015

30.17 Our spiritual discipline can prepare us to face times of change and crisis. Quaker discipline is self-surrender, laying self aside, and allowing ourselves to be led into a fuller life of sharing and service.

'What does love require of us?' This question encourages us to be flexible and creative, ready to change with the world, without being burdened by complex rules or structures.

30.18 My vision is of a passionate, juicy Quakerism, of disciplined rebels and surrendered individualists, a creative order of mundane religious, a company of mutually encouraging, authentic and inspiring fools for that God who is the Source of everything. Honouring both our specific radical Christian witness and the universal nature of the Light Within, perhaps we can make our

small, significant Quaker contribution to the emerging new awareness and, ultimately, to the survival of life on earth.

Alex Wildwood, 1999

30.19 We all need the humility, and the courage, to lay self aside and make space for the Divine to do its work. Then we will be our true selves, and yet enable something greater than ourselves.

Roy Stephenson, 2013

30.20 We can do whatever faith requires of us. We do not do it in our own authority or, wonderfully, in our own power. We are an accompanied people, acting with and for the Divine. We are never alone as part of meetings, never alone as part of that greater web of divine intimacy... Let's move beyond ourselves and let's get on with living the fruits of our collective worship: being Quaker, being community, nurturing transformation in ourselves and in the society around us.

Ben Pink Dandelion, 2014

30.21 We may need to choose change. We may need to surrender to transformation in the same way that in hang gliding, you jump off a cliff and trust that the wind will hold you. We may need to take a leap and trust the spirit. And I think there's an energy in that.

Rhiannon Grant, 2024

See also 4: Quaker discernment.

Living our testimony

30.22 Facing turbulent times, Quakers in Britain seek a future where Quaker values are active in the world.

Our lives speak peace, equality, respect for the earth and all its inhabitants. We offer friendship to all and solidarity to the marginalised. We speak truth to power with love. We hold those in power in the Light. We find creative and nonviolent ways to get our message across. We are in this for the long haul; we're not afraid to take risks. We are called to live in the place where our 'deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet'.

Wrth wynebu cyfnod cythryblus, mae'r Crynwyr ym Mhrydain yn ceisio dyfodol pan fo gwerthoedd y Crynwyr yn weithredol yn y byd.

Mae ein bywydau yn datgan heddwch, cydraddoldeb, parch at y ddaear a'i holl drigolion. Cynigwn gyfeillgarwch i bawb a chydsafwn â'r rhai sydd ar yr ymylon. Mynegwn y gwirionedd â chariad wrth y rhai sydd mewn grym. Daliwn y rhai sydd mewn grym yn y Goleuni. Canfyddwn ffyrdd creadigol a di-drais i gyfleu ein neges. Rydym wedi ymrwymo i'r hirdaith hon; nid oes arnom ofn cymryd risg. Cawn ein galw i fyw yn y man lle mae ein 'llawenydd ysbrydol a newyn ysbrydol y byd yn cwrdd'.

Our faith in the future / Ein ffydd yn y dyfodol, 2015

30.23 The world needs people whose lives speak 'peace, equality and respect for the earth and all its inhabitants'. Living our Quaker testimony in our own place and time calls for discernment, to discover the truth of who we are and how we are called to act now. Many of us are called to help heal and rebuild our world, and the Spirit offers the gifts we need for the work.

30.24 At its best, Quaker thinking about testimony calls members of this community to read their past as a preparation for discerning their present and future calling. The point is not to tell a story of 'where we have been' or to dwell on past greatness, but to tell a story that makes sense of where we are now – and enables the next few steps to make sense... The task of testimony is the task of speaking and doing God's truth, of coming to the light and walking in the light –

in a situation where the truth is not easily apparent and the light is not immediately obvious or attractive.

Rachel Muers, 2015

30.25 How are we led to live out our faith in a world where we see systemic injustice and increasing inequality?

We have been reminded that God's work is where our deep gladness meets the deep suffering in the world, as in Psalm 85: 'Mercy and truth are met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other, truth shall spring out of the earth; And righteousness shall look down from heaven.'

We are all activists and we are all worshippers. Our worship and action spring from the same spiritual source. The light not only illumines us but pushes us to seek change...

The damaged and damaging structures of the world are not the only influence on our lives: there is also the power of faith and the leadings of the Spirit, which if followed will lead us, will push us, towards a better world. That, then, may be the first action we need to take: to be more faithful.

Britain Yearly Meeting, 2015

30.26 It is indeed the coral reefs and ice caps that foretell the future now. It is our young people who can see the future most clearly. To live these times well, to anchor our social witness in more than transactional politics and to translate the fire we feel into something beyond doing the recycling better, we need to allow the Light of an unstable climate to transfigure our deepest beliefs and to anoint us too with the spirit of creation. This is the only true source of hope in these times.

A covenant with the Earth would surely renew our testimonies to include insights from the Earth crises. Simplicity would be seen for the political act it is – a refusal to participate in the wrecking of the

Earth on the altar of idolatrous growth. Equality is reconfigured by the Earth crisis into both climate justice and beyond that answering that of God, not just in everyone, but in everything, every part of the web of life. How would our commitment to peace be reshaped as we come to live the reality that if we are not separate then there can be no 'other' to fight? And truth – working out how to really live the truth contained in a new covenant with the Earth will need all our commitment to truth and its leadings.

Paul Hodgkin, 2022

30.27 We feel a strong calling to build a better, more peaceful society… we have realised that, despite being young, we have the skills and capacity to create the change we want to see. Although the road to peace may be long and complicated, we must look inside and create our own peace in ourselves in order to create peace in our communities. We will continue to strive to show love to everyone in our communities that they may not see in other places, even those we disagree with, and seek to find that of God in everyone.

Junior Yearly Meeting, 2025

See also 5: Quaker testimony and C: Our Quaker faith in action.

Working with others

30.28 Facing turbulent times, Quakers in Britain seek a future where Quakers work collaboratively.

We are well aware that we can't put the world to rights all by ourselves. We value the important work of others. By engaging with them we are already changing the world. We want to break down barriers; we refuse to prejudge who is or is not an ally.

Wrth wynebu cyfnod cythryblus, mae'r Crynwyr ym Mhrydain yn ceisio dyfodol pan fo Crynwyr yn cydweithio.

Rydym yn ymwybodol iawn na allwn roi'r byd yn ei le ar ein pen ein hunain. Gwerthfawrogwn waith pwysig pobl eraill. Drwy ymwneud â hwy rydym eisoes yn newid y byd. Rydym eisiau chwalu rhwystrau; gwrthodwn ragfarnu pwy i gynghreirio â hwy a phwy i beidio.

Our faith in the future / Ein ffydd yn y dyfodol, 2015

30.29 Quakers have often pioneered new social movements, from Oxfam and Save the Children to City of Sanctuary, but we are not alone. We can discover unexpected friends and allies by joining with others who are also working for a more just and peaceful society.

Friends are not always the first to see how the Spirit is at work in the world. We can learn from others who have travelled the road towards justice and healing before us.

30.30 The Quaker minute recording the commitment to reparations [for slavery and colonialism] includes the words 'We do not need to begin this work afresh, but can build upon the foundations laid by others and work with partners including other churches and faith groups.' Churches' Reparations Action Forum representatives have been talking, thinking and writing about the basis for reparation for many years, and it felt like we were building on this minute through meeting with them...

As Quakers in Britain, we are hopeful that the relationships that we are forging with this group, and with others, will help us to play our part in the collective journey towards healing and justice.

Siobhán Haire, 2023

30.31 Many of us have been discovering... that much of the service we thought so unique and so valuable was being done on a larger scale by others, more quietly, more efficiently, as part of their simple duty. It may be that Quakerism will not regain its effectiveness

until we have learned to be ashamed of the proud myth of our uniqueness – and have learned to do our duty quietly and well, unsustained by thoughts of our own great significance.

Charles Carter, 1952

30.32 At the 26th Conference of the Parties for climate action in 2021 (COP26) many faith communities, including Quakers, joined in a day of action and explored how faiths can contribute to climate justice.

On the final Friday, indigenous peoples, farmers, youth, women's movements, trade unions, environmental NGOs and disability rights campaigners united for a People's Plenary, then marched through the official COP26 venue to join activists on the street outside.

Perhaps best of all was the solidarity on display between the climate justice movement and the striking Glasgow cleansing workers. After climate activists joined them on the picket lines, members of the GMB union supported the youth march, forming a guard around high-profile marchers to shield them from an aggressive media. This is the kind of solidarity we need to build everywhere to create a just transition.

Olivia Hanks, 2021

See also 21: Witness with others.

Reaching out

30.33 Facing turbulent times, Quakers in Britain seek a future where Quakers are well known and widely understood.

We are active in our local communities, reaching out in friendship, making more use of our meeting houses for events and for renting or lending out. All members are ready and equipped to explain our Quaker way confidently and clearly to anyone who asks, as well as to speak publicly on issues of concern. We share our practices as appropriate and make full use of relevant media to reach out widely.

In an increasingly divided world, we try to offer 'patterns and examples' of a caring community.

Wrth wynebu cyfnod cythryblus, mae'r Crynwyr ym Mhrydain yn ceisio dyfodol pan fo Crynwyr yn adnabyddus a bod dealltwriaeth dda ohonynt.

Rydym yn weithgar yn ein cymunedau lleol, yn ymestyn allan mewn cyfeillgarwch, ac yn gwneud mwy o ddefnydd o'n tai cwrdd at ddigwyddiadau ac i'w llogi neu roi eu benthyg. Mae'r holl aelodau yn barod a chanddynt y medrau i esbonio ffordd y Crynwyr yn hyderus a chlir i unrhyw un sydd yn gofyn, yn ogystal â siarad yn gyhoeddus ar faterion o bwys.

Rhannwn ein harferion fel sydd yn briodol a gwnawn ddefnydd llawn o gyfryngau perthnasol i ymgyrraedd yn eang. Mewn byd sy'n gynyddol ranedig, ceisiwn gynnig patrymau ac esiamplau o gymuned ofalgar.

Our faith in the future / Ein ffydd yn y dyfodol, 2015

30.34 Quakers have sometimes been reluctant to talk about our faith, fearful of proselytising and lacking confidence to explain the Quaker way. But confidence is growing, as seekers bring new life to our communities and we find fresh ways to share what we have found.

As we share the Quaker way with others, our communities will be enriched by unfamiliar perspectives and different experiences. As we reach out in friendship, we can discover the beauty of people who are not just like us.

30.35 I don't know about you, but I refuse to be depressed about the future of Quakers in Britain. There's so much that's exciting happening. And there is everything to play for. The world needs us. And we need to be generous with our faith, generous in allowing things to change, generous in sharing our experience, generous in extending a welcome. Quakerism has changed my life, and presumably yours. We can't let that not be available to those who need it most, right now.

Paul Parker, 2024

30.36 Once I realized how beautiful people are, and once I learned that to know them is to love them, I started seeking out the people that I don't understand. I look for opportunities to enter their space, because to me, that's how I demonstrate that I truly want to know them. If I invite someone into my space – my home, my Quaker meeting, my book club, my walking group, whatever space I feel comfortable in – I'm communicating with that invitation, 'I want to know you if you're willing to come into my comfort zone.' If I step into someone else's space, I'm saying, 'I have such a sincere desire to know you that I'm willing to come into your comfort zone.'

Emily Provance, 2025

30.37 One of our great joys as a fellowship of seekers is that we can trust one another, and be trusted. Our worship, including our meetings for worship for business, has been deep and rich and gathered. We have been able to look ahead to the future, anticipating regrowth and rebirth of our community and of our passions, and we are excited to contribute to our Yearly Meeting's voice in the wider world.

Young Friends General Meeting, 2024

30.38 George Fox and the early Friends felt called to witness publicly to what they had found: an inward light that could lead us, light our way and give us the strength to go forward. Today there is a renewed leading among Friends to share what we have found with those we encounter in our daily lives. And as Quakers, we have always known 'experimentally' that when you follow the leading of the Spirit, the energy you need will be given to you. Friends are getting ready to open the doors wide and let out our light. And when our doors are open, we'll find that light will also shine in.

Spiritual Hospitality Project, 2003

See also 25: Sharing the Quaker way.

Seeds of renewal

30.39 We cannot know what lies ahead for our Quaker communities or for the world. We do know that there is an unfailing source of new Light that is always available, if we are willing to welcome and follow it. We can be a people who plant seeds of love and hope, who can grieve and let go of the past, in order to grow and flourish in the future.

30.40 We, of all people, should hail with joy the thought that knowledge of all kinds is progressive, that the Divine revelation to man is not finished, but ever unfolding, that for every age the manna of God's truth is given, and that it is our inestimable privilege as well as our duty to welcome the light which may be just reaching us, as from some till now unseen, though none the less fixed star of Heaven. Nay more, we are guilty if we shut our eyes to it, and prefer to live by the Light vouchsafed to an earlier age.

Frances Thompson, 1895

30.41 In October 2024 in Brighton, Young Friends General Meeting shared their hopes and blessings for the future of Quakers in Britain:

I hope for discipline, integrity, radical acts for our vulnerable communities.

I hope we are connected joyfully and lovingly...

I want to plant a seed of simplicity and renewal...

I want to plant a seed of spreading awareness and being unafraid of explaining what Quakerism is, and is to us...

May British Quakerism in the future grieve and let go of what it needs to, in order to flourish and grow...

I want to plant a seed of listening and compassion.

May British Quakerism continue to be a source of comfort and inspiration.

I hope that Quakers of the future will continue to embrace change and seek to improve...

I hope that we continue to act from a position of love and care...

I want to plant a seed of love and hope.

Young Friends General Meeting, 2024

Part F:

Living as a Quaker

Advices and queries for Quakers in Britain

Introduction

F.01 The Quaker way of worship and life can be a challenging path. It may also open us to wholeness, joy and peace.

These advices and queries help us to listen deeply for the guidance of the Spirit. They encourage us to reflect on what we are shown and how we are called to respond, as individuals and Quaker communities. They are intended for personal and group reflection and study, and for reading aloud in meetings for worship.

These short passages distil the wisdom that Friends have gathered over many years from the transforming insights of the Spirit. This same Spirit is available to us and to all who come after us. If we respond to its guidance, we can experience the same healing and renewing power.

There will be times when we make mistakes and fail to live up to the Light we are given. The advices and queries offer encouragement to forgive ourselves, to listen more carefully and to be guided anew.

Some advices and queries challenge us to look at things we might want to ignore. Some may not speak to us immediately or clearly. Learning the skill of deep listening can take time. If we return to them often, we may find that those we struggled with, or tried to ignore, become the gateway to a more faithful and fruitful life.

F.02 It is unwise to treat the advices and queries as a checklist of what to do and what to avoid. If we use them in this way, we may be led to judge ourselves and other people. In the seventeenth century, a meeting of elders at Balby wrote:

> Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.
>
> A meeting of elders at Balby, 1656

F.03 We will be led to respond to the Spirit in different ways. Quaker faith is rooted in spiritual experience and collective sharing. We learn and grow together in love and unity as a community when we listen, beyond the words, to what nourishes the lives of others.

Working with the advices and queries over time can bring comfort and discomfort. We may need to experience both, to open our hearts and minds to God's love and allow it to heal, restore and disturb us.

F.04 Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.

> Ystyriwch, Gyfeillion annwyl, gymhellion cariad a gwirionedd yn eich calonnau. Ymddiriedwch ynddynt fel arweiniad Duw, Goleuni yr hwn sy'n dangos i ni ein tywyllwch gan ein dwyn i fywyd newydd.
>
> *Advices & queries / Cynghorion a holiadau* 1, 1994

Living as a Quaker: Advices and queries for Quakers in Britain

Quaker spirituality and worship

1. In silence together, we seek to still our hearts and minds, ready to wait in the Light. In meeting for worship, we open ourselves to a mystery beyond words which inspires us to live more loving, faithful lives.

2. If you can, come to meeting with heart and mind prepared. If not, come anyway. However troubled we are, the generous kindness of the Spirit can reach us. If we only come when we feel ready, we underestimate God's loving and transforming power.

3. In meeting for worship, distracting thoughts may arise. If we can set them aside, this will free us to focus on expectant waiting. With practice, we learn to listen for the Divine which is within and beyond us all.

4. Meeting for worship can be held anywhere, in any place and online. How do we uphold our shared discipline in different settings? Silence is not an end in itself, but can help us to be still. Our practice of gathered stillness will hold us in the Light.

5. Any of us might be led to speak during meeting for worship. This ministry comes through us, not from us. Even if it feels daunting and words are hard to find, faithful ministry will speak to the heart of someone present. It may open the way to further ministry. Everyone's ministry, whether through words or silent presence, contributes to the depth of our worship.

6. Wait patiently before offering ministry, and carefully test the inner call to speak. Do these words arise from experience of the Spirit? Are they timely, especially towards the end of worship? When you know you must speak, you can trust that the words will come. We all help the meeting by speaking briefly, clearly and not too often.

7. In worship, we may find prayer welling up from a deep place within us. Prayer can help us to settle into stillness. Offered as ministry, our prayers can speak powerfully to the meeting, making us aware of God's presence.

8. Are we open to the spoken ministry of others? Can we hear what is beyond the words, even those that upset or disturb us, to appreciate what we are being offered? Do I listen with an open mind and a generous heart?

9. Meeting for worship can nourish the whole of our lives. The gathered stillness at the heart of it is available to us every moment of the day.

10. Our Quaker way is rooted in the way of Jesus, the way of radical love. Being open to that love transcends our differences of belief. How does Jesus speak to us today? What inspires and supports me to live a life guided by love?

11. Doubt gives us an opportunity to grow. Facing up to our doubts and asking ourselves hard questions can deepen our faith. Sometimes we will be weary and lack confidence. What helps us to remember the strength available to us? We may not always feel it, but the Light is always present to support us.

12. In a busy world, we each need to find our own time for quiet stillness to connect with the Divine. We can listen there for the whispers that let us know what love is asking of us.

13. Do we recognise both the power and the weakness of words to share our inner experience with each other? Is what I say spoken in love and with care? When others speak about their spiritual experience, do I listen for what those words mean for them rather than for myself?

14. The Spirit to which we open our hearts and minds is available to others everywhere. There is inspiration to be found in scripture, in other churches and faiths, and in the world around us. Do I consider new ideas carefully? Am I open to new Light from wherever it may come?

Our Quaker community

15. As we develop a life within a worshipping community, we learn to trust that we can all, separately and together, be guided by the Light. How do we nurture openness and joy in each other's presence so that we come to know one another in the things that are eternal?

16. How can each of us ensure that all in our meeting feel welcome and are safe? Are we alert to the many and varied ways that God's presence can be felt in our midst? Am I sensitive to people's different needs? Growth in community doesn't come from everyone being the same but from valuing difference. The meeting shares a responsibility for every child in its care. Delighting in our diversity makes space for all our needs and gifts.

17. How can we support those who offer service so they find joy in helping our meetings to flourish? Whether appointed to roles or not, we all have a part to play in making our meetings places where hearts open and confidence grows.

18. What love requires of us may not be great busyness. Different situations allow for different contributions. We each have resources to bring to our meeting community and may be surprised by the kinds of service we are able to offer. Loving commitment will help us to give what we can.

19. Community brings us together so that we experience each other as whole people with gifts and flaws. We can all help to weave the threads of acceptance and forgiveness in the fabric of our community. Together, we create a fellowship that supports us in challenging times.

20. Listening to each other and admitting that we ourselves may be mistaken can be difficult to do. How do we face up to these difficulties so that we build trust? When conflict arises, denying or avoiding it may lead to greater pain and trouble. Are we ready to seek help from the wider Quaker community when we cannot find a way forward for ourselves?

21. Sometimes what we as individuals want is not what the community needs. How do we help each other to embrace change? We may need to undertake the hard spiritual work of letting go of cherished convictions. Am I open to the possibility that I am mistaken?

22. When there are decisions to be made in our meetings, we gather in silent worship. Can I set aside my wishes if the meeting is led in a different direction? Our experience tells us that if we listen to each other and wait patiently for divine guidance, then a way will open for us to be led into unity.

Our Quaker faith in action

23. Our Quaker faith is rooted in love which overflows into action. Our witness takes many forms and changes over time as we respond afresh to what love asks of us. The needs in our world are so great that no individual effort can meet them all. This could discourage us. Live adventurously. What does the Spirit call you to do?

24. Any of us may find in our hearts and in our minds something that demands our attention and our action. The prompting can be insistent, unexpected and even unwanted. If this happens to you, turn to your Quaker community to help you discern whether this is truly a calling from God. You may find that others unite with your concern.

25. Being alongside others can give us courage and strength to stand against injustice, but we need to avoid being pushed into polarised positions. Can we recognise that of God in those with a different view? When we feel strongly about an issue, how do we avoid hurtful or provocative language? How do we hold open the way for truthful and generous dialogue so that all voices are heard?

26. Are we willing to give the time and effort required to meet our responsibilities to the wider community? As citizens we respect the laws of the state. But there might be times when faithful witness will lead us to feel we must break the law. If you feel compelled to do so, consider prayerfully and carefully your motives, your actions and their consequences. Ask your meeting to help your discernment.

27. When we worship and work with people from other churches or faiths, we trust that all of us can open our hearts to the central mystery that many call God. Do we listen to those who strive for good, even when their language, culture and imagery are different from our own? While remaining faithful to Quaker insights, do we enter openly into the life and witness of other communities of faith, creating bonds of friendship?

28. Each person is unique, precious and a child of God. To live up to this understanding of equality requires determined work and a willingness to learn. What is the work we need to do to achieve a more equal world? Am I ready to be challenged and make real changes in my behaviour to reduce the risk of harm to others?

29. Peace is much more than an absence of violence and war. We work to build a world of justice, fairness and equity for all. How do I challenge the seeds of war that can be found in my own life? How can we help to build bridges between people, both where we live and in the wider world?

30. The deep desire to live with truth and integrity will touch every part of our lives. All our actions can bear witness to our faith. When societal pressures push me in a different direction, what helps me to stand firm in my principles? How do we support each other to connect in authentic relationships? Consider how habit-forming substances and technologies, or other potentially destructive influences, might impact this.

31. A simple life, if freely chosen, is a source of strength. Our true value does not depend on wealth, possessions or employment. Insecurity may steal our attention, as may material desires. Both lacking essentials and living in excess get in the way of deepening our spiritual life. Focusing on who we can be rather than what we have brings us closer to God. Do I simplify your material needs as far as I can? How do we help each other to live more simply?

32. We live on a beautiful planet which we share with diverse and wonderful life forms. Do I recognise my place as part of a living whole? Humans do not own the world and behaving as if we do

threatens the planet's future. Do I consider the needs of the earth in my everyday choices? Small actions matter. As our world changes, may we go forward with courage and hope. How do we support one another to live more lightly on the earth?

33. Work towards climate justice brings together many aspects of our testimony. There can be no peace without justice, no justice without equality. Integrity requires us to face up to how we benefit from systems that exploit people and the planet. We all depend on each other for well-being in this world. What is my part in the creation of a fairer world?

Our Quaker life journeys

34. Our journeys through life are as varied as we are. Do I seek to learn from the testimony and experience of others? Am I willing to share what I have learnt? We each discern how to live faithfully. The Spirit is constantly revealing new truths to those who seek. There is a continuing cycle of seeking, finding and seeking again.

35. Our sense of who we are will have many elements and may change over a lifetime. For some of us, discovering and claiming our identity will be a tough journey. How do I show respect for others' experience? How can we build understanding between people of all identities? Assumptions embedded in society shape our feelings and behaviour. Do I avoid stereotypes or labelling others?

36. We may find there are tensions between our Quaker values and the culture and practices around us. How can I follow the leadings of the Spirit in all the settings in which I find myself?

37. Life's pleasures can be important ways of experiencing the abundant love of God. We can find fun and enjoyment in many ways: in company and solitude, in activity and stillness; in learning, in creativity, and in sharing our insights. How do my choices impact me, other people and the planet? What brings me joy? Do I allow your happiness to shine out and bless those around me?

38. Any of us can feel overwhelmed by negative feelings. Some of us live with problems created by difficult experiences in childhood. When someone hurts us, or we get it wrong, it is hard to remember the Light that is in us all. How do we avoid causing harm to ourselves and others? Forgiveness is a process that can be tough spiritual work. Can I forgive others and myself? Is it possible to let go of my hurt? How do I hold my own and others' pain in the Light?

39. To love and be loved is a source of joy. Relationships take many forms and through all of them we can recognise the grace of God. At any time, we may meet someone who becomes precious to us. Do I cherish my friendships so that they grow in depth and mutual respect? When troubles come, do I listen for what others need? Can I accept help readily?

40. When we know each other deeply, we can fill each other's lives with light. Being close can also give us the power to hurt one another. Am I always aware of the power I have? Through my words and actions, God's love may reach those close to me.

41. Building a long-term partnership requires us to open our hearts generously to the other in love and trust. This loving commitment can be a life's joy, yet cherishing a partner can be hard daily work. In a Quaker marriage, the couple promise lifelong commitment to each other, knowing that the Spirit and their meeting will uphold them in keeping that promise.

42. In any committed relationship, circumstances may arise when separation is the best course. If led or obliged to separate, be aware of the impact on those close to you, especially children. Allow yourself to grieve for what is lost. Keep trust in your capacity to give and receive love.

43. Families hold potential for great enrichment and great harm. Do I seek ways to communicate well and try to forgive hurts? Whether my family shares my faith or not, do I let the Spirit guide me?

44. A child who is shown love, honesty and respect will be better able to trust others and recognise the Spirit in the world around them. But no one can be a perfect parent all the time. A child who sees adults making mistakes but continuing to walk in the Light will learn how to do this themselves.

45. Throughout our lives we have direct access to the Divine. We do not need special words or skills to experience this. Children may worship in ways that refresh and renew adult understanding. Does our community see God's light in us all, whatever our age? Are all questions answered respectfully? The meeting shares a responsibility for every child in its care. As we grow and learn, may we keep a childlike sense of wonder.

46. Wider society often assumes that everyone has a partner and is part of a conventional family. Some of us live alone and feel fulfilled, while others feel isolated and bereft. Any of us may experience mixed feelings. Am I respectful and caring of all kinds of personal situations?

47. Loss brings pain and the challenge of readjustment. When you face bereavement or other unwanted change, learning to accept loss can be hard and painful work. The realisation that your life has irreversibly altered feels hard, sometimes impossible to bear. Wait in the Light with the emotions this brings. Can you find the courage to share your needs and be open to help from others?

48. When others mourn, be attentive to new needs as the elements of their lives shift around them. Holding someone in the Light is a tender thing to do. When we do this, we too are open to the Light.

49. Caring is practical love. It can be exhausting and under-appreciated. We may struggle to give or accept help with grace. When you are dependent on care from others, remember the Light within you can still help you to offer love. When you provide care, remember your power and be mindful of people's dignity.

50. As we age, we may be less bothered by what others think of us and better able to discern the choices open to us. We may also be burdened with responsibilities. Are I open to all that life brings?

51. Old age is a privilege but can also bring loss, regret and sadness. In older age we encounter increasing restrictions, but we can still have the intense desire to live our life to the fullest. The Light that has always been within us may appear in unexpected and joyful ways.

52. Can I live truthfully and tenderly with the fact that I will die? Am I able to celebrate my response to the Light I have been given? How do we prepare, both spiritually and practically, for death? How can we as a community support those facing death? As we each approach the end of life, the continuing revelation of life in the Spirit may bring us peace. Can we say, with George Fox, "I am glad I was here"?

Byw fel Crynwr/wraig: Cynghorion a holiadau ar gyfer Crynwyr ym Mhrydain

Ysbrydolrwydd ac addoliad y Crynwyr

1. Mewn distawrwydd gyda'n gilydd, ceisiwn dawelu ein calonnau a'n meddyliau, yn barod i aros yn y Goleuni. Wrth gyfarfod i addoli, rydym yn agor ein hunain i ddirgelwch y tu hwnt i eiriau sy'n ein hysbrydoli i fyw bywydau mwy cariadus a ffyddlon.

2. Os gallwch, dewch i'r cyfarfod gyda'ch calon a'ch meddwl wedi paratoi. Os na, dewch beth bynnag. Waeth pa mor ofidus ydym, gall caredigrwydd hael yr Ysbryd ein cyrraedd. Os mai pan fyddwn yn teimlo'n barod yn unig y byddwn yn dod, rydym yn tanystyried nerth cariadus a thrawsnewidiol Duw.

3. Yn y cyfarfod addoli, gall meddyliau godi sy'n mynd â'n sylw. Os gallwn eu rhoi o'r neilltu, bydd hyn yn ein rhyddhau i ganolbwyntio ar aros disgwylgar. Gydag ymarfer, rydym yn dysgu gwrando am y Dwyfol sydd oddi mewn a'r tu hwnt i bob un ohonom.

4. Gellir cynnal cyfarfod addoli yn unrhyw le, yn unrhyw fan ac arlein. Sut ydym yn cynnal ein disgyblaeth gyffredin mewn gwahanol leoliadau? Nid yw distawrwydd yn nod ynddo'i hun, ond gall ein helpu i ymlonyddu. Bydd ein harfer o gydlonyddu yn ein dal yn y Goleuni.

5. Gall unrhyw un ohonom gael ein harwain i siarad yn ystod cyfarfod addoli. Daw'r weinidogaeth hon trwom ni, nid oddi wrthym ni. Hyd yn oed os yw'n teimlo'n frawychus a bod geiriau'n anodd eu canfod, bydd gweinidogaeth ffyddlon yn siarad â chalon rhywun arall sy'n bresennol. Gall agor y ffordd i weinidogaeth bellach. Mae gweinidogaeth pawb, boed trwy eiriau neu bresenoldeb distaw, yn cyfrannu at ddyfnder ein haddoliad.

6. Arhoswch yn amyneddgar cyn cynnig gweinidogaeth, a phrofwch yn ofalus yr alwad fewnol i siarad. A yw'r geiriau hyn yn deillio o brofiad o'r Ysbryd? A ydynt yn amserol, yn enwedig tuag at ddiwedd yr addoliad? Pan fyddwch yn gwybod bod yn rhaid i chi siarad, gallwch ymddiried y bydd y geiriau'n dod. Rydym oll yn helpu'r cyfarfod drwy siarad yn gryno, yn glir a heb fod yn rhy aml.

7. Mewn addoliad, efallai y gwelwn fod gweddi'n tarddu o le dwfn ynom. Gall gweddi ein helpu i ymlonyddu. O'u cynnig fel gweinidogaeth, gall ein gweddïau siarad yn bwerus â'r cyfarfod, gan ein gwneud yn ymwybodol o bresenoldeb Duw.

8. A ydym yn agored i weinidogaeth lafar pobl eraill? A allwn glywed yr hyn sydd y tu hwnt i'r geiriau, hyd yn oed y rhai sy'n ein cynhyrfu neu sy'n aflonyddu arnom, er mwyn gwerthfawrogi'r hyn sy'n cael ei gynnig i ni? A ydw i'n gwrando gyda meddwl agored a chalon hael?

9. Gall cyfarfod i addoli feithrin ein bywydau cyfan. Mae'r cydlonyddwch sydd wrth wraidd hynny ar gael i ni bob eiliad o'r dydd.

10. Mae ein ffordd fel Crynwyr wedi'i gwreiddio yn ffordd Iesu, ffordd cariad radical. Mae bod yn agored i'r cariad hwnnw'n mynd y tu hwnt i'n gwahaniaethau o ran cred. Sut mae Iesu yn siarad â ni heddiw? Beth sy'n fy ysbrydoli a'm cefnogi i fyw bywyd wedi'i arwain gan gariad?

11. Mae amheuaeth yn rhoi cyfle inni dyfu. Gall wynebu ein hamheuon a gofyn cwestiynau anodd i ni'n hunain ddyfnhau ein ffydd. Weithiau byddwn yn llesg ac yn brin o hyder. Beth sy'n ein helpu i gofio'r cryfder sydd ar gael i ni? Efallai na fyddwn bob amser yn ei deimlo, ond mae'r Goleuni bob amser yn bresennol i'n cynnal.

12. Mewn byd prysur, mae angen i bob un ohonom ddod o hyd i'n hamser ein hunain ar gyfer llonyddwch tawel i gysylltu â'r Dwyfol. Gallwn wrando yno am y sibrydion sy'n rhoi gwybod inni beth mae cariad yn ei ofyn gennym.

13. A ydym yn cydnabod pŵer a gwendid geiriau i rannu ein profiad mewnol â'n gilydd? A yw'r hyn a ddywedaf yn cael ei ddweud mewn cariad a chyda gofal? Pan fydd eraill yn siarad am eu profiad ysbrydol, a ydw i'n gwrando am yr hyn y mae'r geiriau hynny'n ei olygu iddyn nhw yn hytrach nag i mi fy hun?

14. Mae'r Ysbryd yr ydym yn agor ein calonnau a'n meddyliau iddo ar gael i eraill ym mhobman. Mae ysbrydoliaeth i'w chael yn yr ysgrythur, mewn eglwysi a chrefyddau eraill, ac yn y byd o'n cwmpas. A ydw i'n ystyried syniadau newydd yn ofalus? A ydw i'n agored i Oleuni newydd o ble bynnag y daw?

Cymuned y Crynwyr

15. Wrth i ni ddatblygu bywyd oddi mewn i gymuned addoli, rydym yn dysgu ymddiried y gallwn ni i gyd, ar wahân a chyda'n gilydd, gael ein harwain gan y Goleuni. Sut ydym yn meithrin llawenydd a bod yn agored ym mhresenoldeb ein gilydd fel ein bod yn dod i adnabod ein gilydd yn y pethau sy'n dragwyddol?

16. Sut gall pob un ohonom sicrhau bod pawb yn ein cyfarfod yn teimlo'n gartrefol ac yn ddiogel? A ydym yn effro i'r nifer o ffyrdd amrywiol y gall presenoldeb Duw gael ei deimlo yn ein plith? A ydw i'n sensitif i wahanol anghenion pobl? Nid wrth i bawb fod yr un fath y daw twf mewn cymuned, ond o werthfawrogi gwahaniaeth. Mae'r cyfarfod yn rhannu cyfrifoldeb dros bob plentyn yn ei ofal. Mae ymhyfrydu yn ein hamrywiaeth yn creu lle i'n holl anghenion a'n doniau.

17. Sut gallwn ni gefnogi'r rhai sy'n cynnig gwasanaeth, fel eu bod yn cael llawenydd wrth helpu ein cyfarfodydd i ffynnu? P'un a ydym wedi ein penodi i rolau ai peidio, mae gan bob un ohonom ran i'w chwarae wrth wneud ein cyfarfodydd yn lleoedd lle mae calonnau'n agor a hyder yn tyfu.

18. Efallai nad prysurdeb mawr yw'r hyn y mae cariad yn ei ofyn gennym. Mae gwahanol sefyllfaoedd yn caniatáu gwahanol gyfraniadau. Mae gan bob un ohonom adnoddau i'w cynnig i gymuned ein cyfarfod ac efallai y byddwn yn synnu at y mathau o wasanaeth y gallwn eu cynnig. Bydd ymrwymiad cariadus yn ein helpu i roi'r hyn a allwn.

19. Mae cymuned yn ein dwyn ynghyd fel ein bod yn profi ein gilydd fel pobl gyflawn sydd â doniau a diffygion. Gallwn oll helpu i blethu edafedd derbyniad a maddeuant yng ngwead ein cymuned. Gyda'n gilydd, crëwn gyfeillach sy'n ein cefnogi mewn cyfnodau heriol.

20. Gall gwrando ar ein gilydd a chyfaddef y gallem ni ein hunain fod yn anghywir fod yn anodd. Sut ydym yn wynebu'r anawsterau hyn er mwyn inni feithrin ymddiriedaeth? Pan fydd gwrthdaro yn codi, gallai ei wadu neu ei osgoi arwain at fwy o boen a gofid. A ydym yn barod i geisio cymorth gan gymuned ehangach y Crynwyr pan na allwn ddod o hyd i ffordd ymlaen i ni ein hunain?

21. Weithiau nid yr hyn rydym ni fel unigolion ei eisiau yw'r hyn sydd ei angen ar y gymuned. Sut allwn ni helpu ein gilydd i groesawu newid? Efallai y bydd angen i ni ymgymryd â'r gwaith ysbrydol caled o ollwng gafael ar argyhoeddiadau annwyl. A ydw i'n agored i'r posibilrwydd fy mod yn anghywir?

22. Pan fydd penderfyniadau i'w gwneud yn ein cyfarfodydd, byddwn yn ymgynnull mewn addoliad distaw. A allaf roi fy nymuniadau o'r neilltu os yw'r cyfarfod yn cael ei arwain i gyfeiriad gwahanol? Mae ein profiad yn dweud wrthym, os ydym yn gwrando ar ein gilydd ac yn aros yn amyneddgar am arweiniad dwyfol, yna bydd ffordd yn agor i ni gael ein harwain at undod.

Ein ffydd fel Crynwyr ar waith

23. Mae ein ffydd fel Crynwyr wedi'i gwreiddio mewn cariad sy'n gorlifo ac sy'n arwain at weithredu. Mae sawl ffurf i'n tystiolaeth ac mae'n newid dros amser wrth i ni ymateb o'r newydd i'r hyn y mae cariad yn ei ofyn wrthym. Mae anghenion ein byd mor fawr fel na all unrhyw ymdrech unigol ddiwallu pob un ohonynt. Gallai hyn ein digalonni. Byddwch fyw'n anturus. Beth mae'r Ysbryd yn eich galw i'w wneud?

24. Gall unrhyw un ohonom ddod o hyd i rywbeth yn ein calonnau ac yn ein meddyliau sy'n mynnu ein sylw a'n gweithredoedd. Gall yr ysgogiad fod yn daer, yn annisgwyl a hyd yn oed yn rhywbeth nas dymunir. Os bydd hyn yn digwydd i chi, trowch at eich cymuned fel Crynwyr i'ch helpu i ddirnad a yw hyn yn alwad gan Dduw mewn gwirionedd. Efallai y gwelwch fod eraill yn cyd-fynd â chi yn eich pryder.

25. Gall bod ochr yn ochr ag eraill roi dewrder a nerth inni sefyll yn erbyn anghyfiawnder, ond mae angen inni osgoi cael ein gwthio at safbwyntiau pegynol. A allwn adnabod yr hyn sydd o Dduw yn y rhai sydd â safbwynt gwahanol? Pan fyddwn yn teimlo'n gryf am fater, sut ydym yn osgoi iaith sy'n brifo neu sy'n herfeiddiol? Sut ydym yn cadw'r ffordd ar agor ar gyfer deialog onest a hael fel y caiff pob llais ei glywed?

26. A ydym yn barod i roi'r amser a'r ymdrech sydd eu hangen i gyflawni ein cyfrifoldebau i'r gymuned ehangach? Fel dinasyddion rydym yn parchu cyfreithiau'r wladwriaeth. Ond efallai y bydd adegau pan fydd tystiolaeth ffyddlon yn ein harwain i deimlo bod yn rhaid i ni dorri'r gyfraith. Os teimlwch reidrwydd i wneud hynny, ystyriwch eich cymhellion, eich gweithredoedd a'u canlyniadau yn weddigar ac yn ofalus. Gofynnwch i'ch cyfarfod helpu eich dirnadaeth.

27. Pan fyddwn yn addoli ac yn gweithio gyda phobl o eglwysi neu grefyddau eraill, ymddiriedwn y gallwn oll agor ein calonnau i'r dirgelwch canolog y mae llawer yn ei alw'n Dduw. A ydym yn gwrando ar y rhai sy'n ymdrechu am ddaioni, hyd yn oed pan fydd eu hiaith, eu diwylliant a'u delweddaeth yn wahanol i'n rhai ni? Wrth

aros yn ffyddlon i ddealltwriaeth y Crynwyr, a ydym yn agored i fywyd a thystiolaeth cymunedau ffydd eraill, gan greu cysylltiadau cyfeillgarwch?

28. Mae pob person yn unigryw, yn werthfawr ac yn blentyn i Dduw. Mae byw yn ôl y ddealltwriaeth hon o gydraddoldeb yn gofyn am waith penderfynol a pharodrwydd i ddysgu. Beth yw'r gwaith sydd angen i ni ei wneud i sicrhau byd mwy cyfartal? Ydw i'n barod i gael fy herio a gwneud newidiadau gwirioneddol yn fy ymddygiad i leihau'r risg o niwed i eraill?

29. Mae heddwch yn llawer mwy nag absenoldeb trais a rhyfel. Rydym yn gweithio i adeiladu byd o gyfiawnder, tegwch a chydraddoldeb i bawb. Sut ydw i'n herio hadau rhyfel sydd i'w canfod yn fy mywyd fy hun? Sut gall pob un ohonom helpu i godi pontydd rhwng pobl, lle rydym yn byw ac yn y byd yn ehangach?

30. Bydd yr awydd dwfn i fyw gyda gwirionedd ac uniondeb yn cyffwrdd â phob rhan o'n bywydau. Gall ein holl weithredoedd dystio i'n ffydd. Pan fydd pwysau cymdeithasol yn fy ngwthio i gyfeiriad gwahanol, beth sy'n fy helpu i sefyll yn gadarn dros fy egwyddorion? Sut ydym yn cefnogi ein gilydd i gysylltu mewn perthnasoedd dilys? Ystyriwch sut gallai sylweddau a thechnolegau sy'n ffurfio arferion, neu ddylanwadau eraill a allai fod yn ddinistriol, effeithio ar hyn.

31. Mae bywyd syml, os caiff ei ddewis yn rhydd, yn ffynhonnell nerth. Nid yw ein gwir werth yn dibynnu ar gyfoeth, eiddo na chyflogaeth. Gall ansicrwydd ddwyn ein sylw, ac felly hefyd chwantau materol. Mae diffyg hanfodion a byw mewn gormodiaeth yn rhwystro ein bywyd ysbrydol rhag dyfnhau. Mae canolbwyntio ar bwy y gallwn fod yn hytrach na'r hyn sydd gennym yn ein dwyn yn agosach at Dduw. A ydw i'n symleiddio fy anghenion materol cyn belled ag y gallaf? Sut gallwn helpu ein gilydd i fyw bywyd symlach?

32. Rydym yn byw ar blaned hardd yr ydym yn ei rhannu â ffurfiau bywyd amrywiol a rhyfeddol. A ydw i'n adnabod fy lle fel rhan o gyfanrwydd byw? Nid yw bodau dynol yn berchen ar y byd ac mae ymddwyn fel pe baem yn bygwth dyfodol y blaned. A ydw i'n ystyried anghenion y Ddaear yn fy newisiadau bob dydd? Mae

gweithredoedd bach yn bwysig. Wrth i'n byd newid, bydded i ni symud ymlaen gyda dewrder a gobaith. Sut gallwn gefnogi ein gilydd i fyw'n ysgafnach ar y ddaear?

33. Mae gwaith tuag at gyfiawnder hinsawdd yn dwyn ynghyd lawer o agweddau ar ein tystiolaeth. Ni all fod heddwch heb gyfiawnder, ni all fod cyfiawnder heb gydraddoldeb. Mae uniondeb yn ei gwneud yn ofynnol inni wynebu sut rydym yn elwa o systemau sy'n camfanteisio ar bobl a'r blaned. Rydym i gyd yn dibynnu ar ein gilydd am lesiant yn y byd hwn. Beth yw fy rhan i wrth greu byd tecach?

Ein teithiau drwy fywyd fel Crynwyr

34. Mae ein teithiau trwy fywyd mor amrywiol ag yr ydym ni. A ydw i'n ceisio dysgu o dystiolaeth a phrofiad pobl eraill? A ydw i'n barod i rannu'r hyn rydw i wedi'i ddysgu? Rydym i gyd yn dirnad sut i fyw'n ffyddlon. Mae'r Ysbryd yn gyson yn datgelu gwirioneddau newydd i'r rhai sy'n eu ceisio. Mae yna gylch parhaus o geisio, darganfod, a cheisio eto.

35. Bydd gan ein synnwyr o bwy ydym lawer o elfennau a gall newid dros oes. I rai ohonom, bydd darganfod a hawlio ein hunaniaeth yn daith anodd. Sut ydw i'n dangos parch at brofiad pobl eraill? Sut gallwn feithrin dealltwriaeth rhwng pobl o bob hunaniaeth? Mae rhagdybiaethau sydd wedi'u hymgorffori mewn cymdeithas yn llunio ein teimladau a'n hymddygiad. A ydw i'n osgoi stereoteipiau neu labelu eraill?

36. Efallai y byddwn yn canfod bod tensiynau rhwng ein gwerthoedd fel Crynwyr a'r diwylliant a'r arferion o'n cwmpas. Sut gallaf ddilyn arweiniad yr Ysbryd ym mhob sefyllfa yr wyf ynddi?

37. Gall pleserau bywyd fod yn ffordd bwysig o brofi cariad helaeth Duw. Gallwn ganfod hwyl a mwynhad mewn sawl ffordd: mewn cwmni ac ar ein pen ein hunain, mewn gweithgarwch a llonyddwch; wrth ddysgu, mewn creadigrwydd ac wrth rannu ein dealltwriaeth. Sut mae fy newisiadau'n effeithio arnaf i, ar bobl eraill ac ar y blaned? Beth sy'n rhoi llawenydd i mi? A ydw i'n caniatáu i'm hapusrwydd ddisgleirio a bendithio'r rhai o'm cwmpas?

38. Gall unrhyw un ohonom deimlo ein bod wedi ein llethu gan deimladau negyddol. Mae rhai ohonom yn byw gyda phroblemau a grëwyd gan brofiadau anodd yn ystod plentyndod. Pan fydd rhywun yn ein brifo, neu pan fyddwn yn methu, mae'n anodd cofio'r Goleuni sydd ynom ni i gyd. Sut ydym yn osgoi achosi niwed i ni'n hunain ac i eraill? Mae maddeuant yn broses a all fod yn waith ysbrydol anodd. A allaf faddau i eraill, ac i mi fy hun? A yw'n bosibl gollwng gafael ar fy mhoen? Sut ydw i'n dal fy mhoen fy hun a phoen eraill yn y Goleuni?

39. Mae caru a chael eich caru yn ffynhonnell llawenydd. Mae sawl ffurf i berthynas a thrwy bob un ohonynt gallwn adnabod gras Duw. Ar unrhyw adeg, gallem gwrdd â rhywun a fydd yn dod yn annwyl i ni. A ydw i'n trysori fy nghyfeillgarwch ag eraill fel eu bod yn tyfu o ran dyfnder a pharch at ein gilydd? Pan ddaw trafferthion, a ydw i'n gwrando ar yr hyn sydd ei angen ar eraill? A allaf dderbyn cymorth yn rhwydd?

40. Pan fyddwn yn adnabod ein gilydd yn ddwfn, gallwn lenwi bywyd ein gilydd â goleuni. Gall bod yn agos hefyd roi'r grym inni frifo ein gilydd. A ydw i bob amser yn ymwybodol o'r nerth sydd gennyf? Drwy fy ngeiriau a'm gweithredoedd, gall cariad Duw gyrraedd y rhai sy'n agos ataf.

41. Mae adeiladu partneriaeth hirdymor yn gofyn i ni agor ein calonnau'n hael i'r llall mewn cariad ac ymddiriedaeth. Gall yr ymrwymiad cariadus hwn fod yn llawenydd bywyd, ond gall trysori cymar fod yn waith caled bob dydd. Ym mhriodas y Crynwyr, mae'r pâr yn addo ymrwymiad oes i'w gilydd, gan wybod y bydd yr Ysbryd a'u Cyfarfod yn eu cynnal i gadw'r addewid hwnnw.

42. Mewn unrhyw berthynas ymrwymedig, gall amgylchiadau godi pan mai gwahanu fyddai orau. Os cewch eich arwain neu eich gorfodi i wahanu, byddwch yn ymwybodol o'r effaith ar y rhai sy'n agos atoch, yn enwedig plant. Caniatewch i chi'ch hun alaru am yr hyn a gollwyd. Cadwch i ymddiried yn eich gallu i roi a derbyn cariad.

43. Mae gan deuluoedd y potensial i gyfoethogi'n fawr ac i wneud niwed mawr. A ydw i'n chwilio am ffyrdd o gyfathrebu'n dda a

cheisio maddau poen? P'un a yw fy nheulu'n rhannu fy ffydd ai peidio, a ydw i'n gadael i'r Ysbryd fy arwain?

44. Bydd plentyn sy'n profi cariad, gonestrwydd a pharch yn gallu ymddiried yn well mewn eraill ac yn gallu adnabod yr Ysbryd yn well yn y byd o'i gwmpas. Ni all neb fod yn rhiant perffaith, drwy'r amser. Bydd plentyn sy'n gweld oedolion yn gwneud camgymeriadau ond yn parhau i gerdded yn y Goleuni, yn dysgu sut i wneud hyn ei hunan.

45. Drwy gydol ein bywyd mae gennym lwybr uniongyrchol at y Dwyfol. Nid oes angen geiriau na sgiliau arbennig arnom i brofi hyn. Gall plant addoli mewn ffyrdd sy'n adfywio ac yn adnewyddu dealltwriaeth oedolion. A yw ein cymuned yn gweld goleuni Duw ynom ni i gyd, beth bynnag fo'n hoedran? A yw pob cwestiwn yn cael ei ateb yn barchus? Mae'r cyfarfod yn rhannu cyfrifoldeb dros bob plentyn yn ei ofal. Wrth i ni dyfu a dysgu, boed i ni gadw ymdeimlad plentyn o ryfeddod.

46. Mae cymdeithas ehangach yn aml yn tybio bod gan bawb gymar a bod pawb yn rhan o deulu confensiynol. Mae rhai ohonom yn byw ar ein pennau ein hunain ac yn teimlo'n gyflawn, tra bod eraill yn teimlo'n ynysig ac yn amddifad. Gall unrhyw un ohonom brofi teimladau cymysg. A ydw i'n barchus tuag at bob math o sefyllfaoedd personol ac yn ofalgar ohonynt?

47. Mae colled yn dod â phoen a her wrth addasu. Pan fyddwch yn wynebu profedigaeth neu newid arall nas dymunir, gall dysgu derbyn colled fod yn waith caled a phoenus. Mae sylweddoli bod eich bywyd wedi newid yn barhaol yn teimlo'n anodd, weithiau'n amhosibl ei ddioddef. Arhoswch yn y Goleuni gyda'r emosiynau a ddaw yn sgil hyn. A allwch chi ddod o hyd i'r dewrder i rannu eich anghenion a bod yn agored i gymorth gan eraill?

48. Pan fydd eraill yn galaru, rhowch sylw i anghenion newydd wrth i elfennau eu bywydau newid o'u cwmpas. Mae dal rhywun yn y Goleuni yn beth tyner i'w wneud. Pan wnawn hyn, rydym ni hefyd yn agored i'r Goleuni.

49. Mae gofalu yn gariad ymarferol. Gall fod yn flinedig a heb ei werthfawrogi'n ddigonol. Efallai y byddwn yn cael trafferth rhoi neu dderbyn cymorth yn raslon. Pan fyddwch yn ddibynnol ar ofal gan eraill, cofiwch y gall y Goleuni y tu mewn i chi eich helpu i gynnig cariad o hyd. Pan fyddwch yn rhoi gofal, cofiwch eich nerth a byddwch yn ystyriol o urddas pobl.

50. Wrth i ni heneiddio, efallai y byddwn yn poeni llai am yr hyn y mae eraill yn ei feddwl amdanom ac yn gallu dirnad y dewisiadau sydd ar gael i ni yn well. Efallai y bydd hefyd arnom faich cyfrifoldebau. A ydw i'n agored i bopeth y mae bywyd yn ei gynnig?

51. Mae henaint yn fraint ond gall hefyd ddod â cholled, edifeirwch a thristwch. Yn ein henaint rydym yn wynebu cyfyngiadau cynyddol, ond gallwn o hyd fod â'r awydd dwys i fyw ein bywyd i'r eithaf. Gall y Goleuni sydd wedi bod ynom erioed ymddangos mewn ffyrdd annisgwyl a llawen.

52. A allaf fyw'n onest ac yn dyner gyda'r ffaith y byddaf yn marw? A allaf ddathlu fy ymateb i'r Goleuni a roddwyd i mi? Sut ydym yn paratoi, yn ysbrydol ac yn ymarferol, ar gyfer marwolaeth? Sut gallwn ni fel cymuned gefnogi'r rhai sy'n wynebu marwolaeth? Wrth i bob un ohonom agosáu at ddiwedd ein hoes, gall y datguddiad parhaus o fywyd yn yr Ysbryd ddod â heddwch inni. A allwn ddweud, gyda George Fox, "Rwy'n falch y bûm i yma"?

Part G:

Non-text material

Introduction

The Book of Discipline Revision Committee discerned that there should be non-text material accompanying and illustrating our new book of discipline.

Non-text material is creative content beyond words on the page. It should amplify or illustrate the text, saying what words cannot. It could be beautiful, moving, startlingly new, affectionately familiar or funny.

Considering the need for a text that is as accessible as possible, we realise that creative or alternative mediums to text can be much more accessible to some people, while also being aware that they can be less accessible to others, for example, those with visual impairments.

Material using a variety of formats has been collected to illustrate the five main headings of our draft text:

- Our Quaker spirituality and worship
- Our Quaker community
- Our Quaker faith in action
- Our Quaker life journeys
- Our Quaker story

There are, of necessity, restrictions on what could be published in hard copy text – only visual creative content can easily be offered. An electronic draft offers much greater opportunity for the creative use of audio and audio-visual material.

At present, because of considerations of time and cost, only a small number of images appear within the draft text. An additional selection of examples of non-text material is available online at: www.quaker.org.uk/newbook. Scan the QR code to access the link:



It is expected that, in the final draft and published version, non-text material will appear in appropriate places within the text.

Questions to consider when you have looked at the suggested material:

- Is my Quaker experience represented in these examples?
- Where in our current draft text might this type of content be useful and enriching?
- What non-text material would you like to see in the future book of discipline?

The history of our book of discipline

Advices and queries

> What Friends in the ministry, in their respective counties, departed this life since the last yearly meeting?
>
> What Friends imprisoned for their testimony have died in prison since the last yearly meeting?
>
> How the Truth has prospered amongst them since the last yearly meeting, and how Friends are in peace and unity?
>
> London Yearly Meeting, 1682

When Yearly Meeting in London decided to ask the representatives from each quarterly meeting to reply to these questions, the systematic organisation of meetings had only recently been completed. These questions were intended to collect local knowledge about the progress of the Society from Friends, so help could be given where it was most needed.

As the use of questions took root in the Society, the term 'query' was increasingly used instead of 'question'. The practice of replying to queries became more formal, and they were increasingly used to ensure consistency of conduct among Friends as well as to collect information about the state of the Society. After 1760, the main purpose of the queries was to encourage Friends to maintain Quaker discipline.

In 1791, London Yearly Meeting adopted the first 'general advices'. They were short and mainly concerned with the domestic life of the Society and its members.

From 1787, Yearly Meeting encouraged Friends to use the queries for self-examination. This gradually became more important than their

disciplinary role, leading to revisions in 1860 and 1875. Over this period, the general advices were also revised, lengthened and extended in scope.

A major revision of the general advices and queries took place in 1928. This included a greater emphasis on the social responsibilities of Quakers. Both the advices and the queries were increased in length, and the use of queries became increasingly devotional.

The revision brought to Yearly Meeting in 1994 took a new approach. Rather than presenting separate advices and queries for each topic, it combined them into a single series of 'advices and queries'. The current version retains the same format.

The published book of discipline

Within two generations of the establishment of London Yearly Meeting, it discerned a need for clear guidance about how our Quaker meetings should be run ('church government') and how Quakers should live their faith.

Originally this was achieved by the circulation of handwritten epistles, minutes and other documents, which were first collected together in 1738. In 1783 the handwritten volumes were replaced by a printed volume, *Extracts from the minutes and advices of the Yearly Meeting of Friends held in London from its first institution.*

Since that time, revisions have taken place approximately once a generation, as Friends discerned the need for new guidance and inspiration. From 1955, our Yearly Meeting used both Christian faith and practice and various editions of Church government. Both were replaced by Quaker faith & practice*, which was approved by Yearly Meeting in 1994. The church government chapters of* Quaker faith & practice *were regularly updated, resulting in five editions of the book, which was also published and maintained online from 2013.*

In 2018, Britain Yearly Meeting agreed that it was time to revise our book of discipline again, encouraging the revision committee to be 'prayerful, joyful, creative and bold'. This publication, Our Quaker Way*, is the result.*

It was adopted by Britain Yearly Meeting in [20xx], with the purpose of helping Quakers in Britain to thrive and to be faithful to the guidance of the Spirit for our times.

> Therefore let us take the good advice left upon record, as much as in us lies, live peaceably with all and do unto all as we would they should do unto us.
>
> Women's Yearly Meeting, 1698

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Our Quaker Way

This is the draft text of a possible new book of discipline for Quakers in Britain. It was created by the Book of Discipline Revision Committee at the request of Britain Yearly Meeting and released in November 2026. Discernment on it will take place at Yearly Meeting in July 2027.

In 2018, Britain Yearly Meeting asked for a new book "which can speak and be accessible to all present and future Quakers". The book "should draw on the richness of theological thought in our yearly meeting now and historically, seeing diversity as fundamental to our community", and use "plain and simple" language. The revision committee were encouraged to be "prayerful, joyful, creative and bold".

This draft text is available in electronic and printed forms, with some chapters also in audio versions. It can be read online at: oqw.quaker.org.uk

Additional material, including a glossary, is available on the website: www.quaker.org.uk/oqw

All Quakers in Britain are invited to read, reflect, and respond. Woodbrooke and Quakers in Britain staff will support the Committee in providing a range of resources to help individual Friends, meetings and other groups. These include online materials and events, courses, in-person events, and facilitators and speakers who can visit meetings.

Find out more about this draft and its history at www.quaker.org.uk/newbook

Find out more about Woodbrooke's offer and ways to respond at www.woodbrooke.org.uk/rrr

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