

Possibilities for simpler meetings

Here is a menu of possibilities an area meeting and its local meetings could use, in response to pressures on them and their role holders. Like a menu, you can consider the whole range; you can choose ones you like; and you can combine them together.

The aim: to liberate Quakers for spiritual growth, community building, outreach & witness in the world.

We could:

Static / the same approach

1. Stay just as we are.
2. Stay just as we are – and expect people to try harder, do more, do better etc.
3. Stay as we are – and re-frame things in a more positive light, rather than doom and gloom.
4. Just change a few small things.
5. Get smaller, and adapt accordingly.

Learning, Understanding, Sharing, Community

6. Have more opportunities for learning, understanding and sharing.
7. Strengthen community building. Eg: Occasions just focused on building community. Fun activities together. Meetings for learning. Combine learning with a meal. Have an annual residential meeting. Host people in our homes. Focus on all age and inclusion. Invite Woodbrooke on the Road for a day. Use resources like 'Becoming Friends', 'All are Welcome', 'Engaging with Families', resources from 'Being Friends Together' etc...
(see also Area Meeting below)
8. Invest money in learning and community, like you spend money on buildings.
9. Encourage training for role holders, with a budget and a simple, attractive bursary system.
10. Arrange training or learning with neighbouring area meetings.
11. Encourage elders and overseers to feel supported and enabled to play their roles.

People and Roles

12. Role holders can have buddies from other meetings and former role holders.
13. Have a good handover and induction.
14. Role holders can get together (with cake!) to share ideas and support (eg LM & AM clerks).
15. Role holders can get together across a group of area meetings, to share ideas and support.
16. Review key roles of the AM (clerk, treasurer, clerk to trustees): How to make these roles less 'unattractive'? Being more collaborative? Working with an assistant? Having a team? Dividing the role based on skills? Rotating? Not being at every meeting? Delegating? Support for specific elements (like IT)? Cover aspects where someone is not confident? Paid support? (see later) Not having to commit to serve for 3 years? etc...
17. Review all roles in the AM, which may free some people for remaining roles. Do we really need all these roles? Could some small roles be combined? Could big roles be divided or shared, or supported differently? Could an attender support a role holder who needs to be a member. Do we need quite as many people filling some roles? (eg trustees, elders, overseers etc Are we trying to do too much, spreading ourselves too thinly? etc....
18. Reviewing roles in local meetings (asking the questions above) may free people for other roles.
19. Match tasks to people's skills and availability, instead of fitting people into fixed roles which each have long list of fixed tasks.
20. Does each task actually need doing? Explore what would happen if we dropped it.
21. Does organising the task (like having a rota) take too much time. Would it still work without?
22. Clarify who can decide what (delegation), so some things can move forward without involving everyone, avoiding issues moving back and forth between meetings and committees.

23. Try different forms of eldership and oversight (eg a corporate model involving a wider group with fewer formal roles, and mixing more and less experienced Friends).
24. Do you need quite so many trustees / elders / overseers (etc...)?
25. Change committees: combine some, or divide some, or lay down a committee and ask one or two Friends to lead and involve people as they need to.
26. Hold some committees jointly across two areas, or across two local meetings.
27. Share some roles across two areas, eg safeguarding, registering officer, archivist etc?
28. Support and encourage worshippers to be active Quakers and role holders.
29. Focus on gathering and growing new worshippers, for the long term.

Area Meeting

30. Focus on the area meeting as both a decision-making meeting and a community of Quakers.
31. Review how area meeting business operates: the balance of worship, community, concerns, appointments, decisions, learning, food etc...
32. Try some variations: different combinations of the list above; different days etc...
33. Consider: frequency, timing/day, agenda content, length, style(s), focus, all age, eldership and discipline, inclusion, how reports are handles, location, food, practicalities, empowering local meetings to act on political issues themselves, duplication with trustees etc....
34. Have a group that meets to do some preparation +/- business between (fewer?) area meetings (eg a committee of clerks, or an area meeting committee open to all). Learn from other AMs...
35. Have some items as a 'consent agenda' with draft minutes circulated in advance, where discernment of the area meeting is not required.
36. Consider how to make AM an occasion people want to come to!
37. Ask whether it is the discernment of the area meeting, if people can only come if they can spare 6 or 8 hours (with travel), 8 or 9 times a year?
38. Actively choose which wider topics/concerns to focus on, and joyfully leave others to others.
39. Take more business at area meeting, and less at local meetings. Or:
40. Take less business at area meeting, and more at local meetings.
41. Use tele/video conferences for some meetings/committees: reduces travel & increases access.

Trustees

42. Clarify which business is for trustees and which for area meeting in session: reduce duplication.
43. Use trustee sub-groups to divide up the work (eg finance, property, policy), so everybody does not have to consider all topics in detail.
44. Allow sub-groups to make some delegated decisions, within clear limits.
45. Bring some people who are not trustees onto sub-groups, where they can contribute expertise.
46. Invite visitors to trustee meetings, to enable people to learn what trustees do.
47. Adapt and adopt model policies from BYM, or other AMs, to reduce time re-inventing wheels.
48. Trustees of neighbouring AMs can adopt the same policies, to reduce re-inventing wheels.
49. Several AM trustee bodies could maximize what they do in common, without structural change.

Treasurers and accounts

50. Divide up the Treasurer role (LM or AM). One person does not have to do all of this: high level financial oversight; bookkeeping; approving payments, management accounts; appeals and collecting; managing delegated budgets. What can only be done by the Treasurer?
51. Have a paid bookkeeper.
52. Use a common online finance system, across LMs and AMs.
53. Use electronic banking more, with clear authorisers for different amounts or decisions
54. Use more delegated decision making.
55. Place a small meeting's finances within a larger meeting's accounts (or the area meeting's).
56. LM does not use money – contributions go to area or another meeting, which pays a few bills.

57. Handle cash collections differently eg charity collections go direct to the charity; cash is banked less frequently, and not by the treasurer.

Paying people to do things – just as you pay a cleaner or someone to service the boiler:

58. Bookkeeper (14% of local meetings already use a paid bookkeeper)
59. Accounts examiner
60. Administrator (eg help for AM clerk, membership records, supporting trustees, gift aid etc)
61. Managing lettings
62. A property maintenance service or trusted tradespeople
63. Property advice, property transactions, or managing major works
64. A local development worker, shared with other AMs
65. A youth worker (for children at meeting, or for young people)

Employees

66. Use standard terms and conditions and employment policies (on BYM website)
67. An employee can work across more than one area (eg an administrator).
68. One area meeting or a property trust can employ staff for several area meetings.
69. A warden can have an extended role, eg for AM administration, bookkeeping (if suitable skills).
70. Contractors can be used instead of employees for some roles, reducing some employer risks.

Managing Property

(See also Paying people to do things, above)

71. Use a system of trusted traders, with one person co-ordinating others.
72. Use a comprehensive property management service, with trusted tradespeople, overseeing work done for a small fee eg for historic buildings.
73. A property trust can serve several area meetings, managing buildings and major finances.
74. The remit of a property trust can expand to include maintenance, utilities, lettings, employment etc.
75. Several small property trusts could combine into one, or have the same trustees.
76. Focus on increasing income of some properties, to pay for things that reduce volunteers' work.

Meetings changing

77. Open a new meeting which matches where worshippers live, or for a new/different population.
78. Increase the number of meetings for worship, in the same building on different days/times.
79. Try experimenting with meeting at a different time or place for a set period: see what happens.
80. Lay down a local meeting, and join another (even across AM boundaries!).
81. Recognise a local meeting may in the medium term lay itself down, and support this phase.

Small meetings

82. Recognise meetings don't have to do everything the way a large/medium sized meeting does.
83. Focus on six essentials: Public worship; Being known/found; Community; Connections with other Quakers/AM; Clerk/Convenor; Decisions (business meeting need not be monthly!).
84. Are there ways of doing things that suit your numbers better?
85. Can you do some things with another meeting? Eg Learning, socials, sharing some roles.
86. Some do without money altogether: contributions go direct to AM, and AM or another meeting pays bills.
87. Agree with area meeting how some things will be handled eg eldership, oversight, finances etc. (See also Grouping Meetings: grouping, combining, clusters. And Meeting Houses)

Meeting Houses - alternatives

88. Recognise while some meeting houses serve us really well – in location, for our community, for income, for social action - some do not do this so well.
89. Realise that 26% of British local meetings don't have a meeting house: it can be done!
90. Ask: Is our meeting house an asset or a liability? Is it doing God's work/doing good? What could Quakers do with these assets, time and money? What would George Fox make of all these historic buildings? Where would Jesus be? Where would it be good for us to meet?

91. Move a meeting (house) to a more useful place e.g. location, size, upkeep, income...
92. Use a meeting house differently: for a social purpose you are led to, like a haven for retreats and events, or a community centre, or dwellings, or a base for a community organisation.
93. Meet in another room in the meeting house, and re-use the space.
94. Rent out part of the meeting house, and use the income for a purpose.
95. Sell a meeting house and rent a space in the same building.
96. Sell a meeting house and rent a space in a different building.
97. Meet in people's homes (or in a barn!)

Grouping Meetings Differently

98. Group differently: Pair a larger meeting with a smaller meeting. Have a small worshipping group attached to a LM. A worshipping group becomes a LM.
99. Have clusters of local meetings & worshipping groups, to do some things together (community, learning, oversight, finances etc).
100. Join several small LMs into one LM with several meetings for worship and one business meeting.
101. Reduce what must be done by each local meeting, by sharing, grouping, agreeing, deleting.
102. Clarify expectations between area and local meetings, with a memorandum of understanding.

Structural - Areas and Trustees

(See also Managing Property, Trustees, and Groupings, above)

It is possible to:

103. Change the geography of nearby area meetings a little - one or two local meetings switch.
104. Change the geography of nearby area meetings a lot - group local meetings differently.
105. Dissolve an area meeting, with local meetings joining other areas.
106. Divide an area meeting if too large, while retaining some joint activities.
107. Pair up with another area meeting for some business, or for community, or committees, etc.
108. Keep separate AM charities and AMs in session, while a single set of trustees does business across two or more area meetings (with combined trustee meetings or back to back).
109. Merge two (or several) area meetings completely (AM in session, charities, trustees, roles).
110. Have one charity with a single set of trustees, keeping two or several AMs at their previous size for worship, community, concerns, appointments, some major decisions, some smaller decisions, etc.

Digital

111. Use email lists to communicate – for notices with attachments or links, and for groups.
112. Have printing buddies for those without computers.
113. Use new social media for some internal and external communication.
114. Use electronic banking, and online accounting
115. Use video conferencing for committees – saves time, carbon and can include people.
116. Use video conferencing for worship – enabling people to join worship wherever they are.

Do send more ideas, to Jonathan Carmichael, Simpler Meetings Project jonathanc@quaker.org.uk