

## **Simpler meetings – meeting houses: alternatives**

This document is about possibilities. It shares many ideas collected from Quakers around Britain about how we can simplify the way we organise ourselves. You can find more topics here: [www.quaker.org.uk/simplermeetings](http://www.quaker.org.uk/simplermeetings). For each topic there is a document and a short video. All the topics are collected in “*Simpler Meetings – what is possible*”, which also explains ways you can approach the topics.

### **Meeting houses and alternatives**

Some of our meeting houses serve us really well. They are in the right location, they speak to the world about us, or they bring in some money, or they provide a really good community function. Hopefully a meeting house fulfils several of those.

However, we know that some of them just do not serve us so well. Around the country, Friends are doing a number of different things in response:

- Moving to a more useful place, selling one and buying another
- Using their meeting houses for a social purpose and really focusing on that as the purpose for the building
- Meeting in a smaller room in their existing building and reusing the large space for another purpose
- Selling the meeting house and renting a room that suits them really well
- Meeting in their own homes
- You could simply meet in a barn, like we used to. At a conference recently someone said “Actually, we *do* meet in a barn”!

### **Experience of a small meeting**

“I went to a small local meeting recently, in an Arts Centre. It was a really interesting experience. I arrived a little early, and after they unlocked the door, we got some chairs out. We put a table in the circle and a few books. We put a table on one side with some leaflets and books that might be of interest. And we worshiped. Afterwards we had a good chat, then the chairs went away and that was it. They didn't have to think about all those other things that go with having a building. In terms of simplicity, that is really big.”

### **How many meetings meet without a meeting house?**

126 meetings in Britain Yearly Meeting meet without a meeting house. That is 26% of the 475. Many of them are thriving.

### **How do meetings without a meeting house find it simpler?**

A quarter of Britain's meetings do not have people focusing on maintenance or lettings. They have fewer decisions to make. Nobody manages or supports a warden. The load on the treasurer is dramatically reduced, plus the load on trustees. Of course, using someone else's space does sometimes bring constraints. The meeting may also need to pay more attention to being known, and to building a sense of identity. There are pros and cons to be weighed up, and it needs careful consideration. It is probably the biggest way to simplify what a meeting has to do.

### **What questions might Friends ask if unsure about their meeting house?**

- Is this meeting house doing God's work? Is it doing good?
- Is it an asset, or is it really a liability?
- What else could Quakers do with the time and money we are putting into this building?
- What could we learn from the 126 local meetings in Britain who do not have a meeting house?
- Are we really called to be "*The Religious Society of Community Centres and Historic Buildings*"?
- What would George Fox make of all these historic buildings?
- Where would Jesus be?
- Friends, where would be a good place for us to meet?

### **Can you help?**

The Simpler Meetings project is gathering and sharing ways that Quakers find work well for them. The aim is to liberate the joy of being a Quaker. You can learn more at [www.quaker.org.uk/simplermeetings](http://www.quaker.org.uk/simplermeetings). Please send your ideas and suggestions to Jonathan Carmichael, Simpler Meetings Project Manager at [JonathanC@Quaker.org.uk](mailto:JonathanC@Quaker.org.uk).

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