YM 2026 11 07

Book of Discipline Revision Committee report

The Book of Discipline Revision Committee presents this our first report to Yearly Meeting, having previously reported annually to Meeting for Sufferings.

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 draft the book, and encouraged it to be "prayerful, joyful, creative and bold". We were appointed in 2019 and started work immediately.

The first draft of the new book of discipline

We have prepared a first draft which is being launched at Yearly Meeting on 21 November 2026. It is 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.

The first draft's working title is ***Our Quaker way,*** and subtitle ***The spiritual discipline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain***. We discerned this 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 the 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, A to F:

- (A) Our Quaker Spirituality and Worship (chapters 1 to 5) – covering worship, spiritual experience, theology, discernment and testimony
- (B) 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
- (C) Our Quaker Faith in Action (chapters 19 to 25) – witness, testimony and sharing with others
- (D) Our Quaker Life Journeys (chapters 26 to 28) – covering identity, belonging, love, loss, growth and change
- (E) Our Quaker Story (chapters 29 and 30) – our history and future
- (F) Living as a Quaker – Advices and queries.

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

As requested by Yearly Meeting 2018, the draft book focusses – 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. To help them with that, we have been preparing lists of the supplementary material we think will be required, the material currently available (though some will need to be updated), and the gaps that will need to be filled by new material. 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.

The draft text is mainly words. We intend that the final book will include non-text content such as visual and other material. The present draft includes as Part G some illustrative examples of such possible non-text content.

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 Friends will read the whole draft cover-to-cover. Not everyone may be able to do so, however, so we will be suggesting some sample chapters – one from each part of the book - to give Friends a flavour of the draft and of how it differs from *Quaker faith & practice.*

To further help Friends find their way through the book, we are creating a set of “guided pathways” that follow various themes.

Friends will be able to download the guided pathways and send their responses via the Woodbrooke website from the rise of Yearly Meeting 21 November 2026.

Key questions for responses

We hope responses will focus on broad-brush aspects of the draft, rather than detailed textual points. Friends might ask themselves 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?

Detailed drafting comments and suggestions can be submitted 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 responses, suggested material - including anthology quotations – to fill any gaps identified and to increase the diversity of personal experiences and perspectives across Quakers in Britain within the book.

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 Friends 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.

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