



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

At the Yearly Meeting Gathering

Held online, 19 July – 8 August 2021

Substantive minutes

Minute 17: Anti-racism, our Quaker journey

Tackling systemic racism is a spiritual imperative. (BYM Epistle 2020). Around our yearly meeting Friends have been hearing and acting on a call to tackle systemic racial injustice. In December 2020, Meeting for Sufferings minuted “Our testimonies to equality and truth demand that we engage in a drive towards real change, turning our declared intentions into reality. We are called to commit to becoming an actively anti-racist church.”

Preparatory events at this Gathering have given us time to reflect on Quaker responses to racism. We have heard about some of the ways Quakers have responded to racism, in local and area meetings and our local communities. We have had opportunities for discernment regarding racism and anti-racism, and to think more deeply about what we are tasked with doing.

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. As a body we must seek to inhabit feelings of shame and discomfort.

But if not now, then when? We cannot tolerate any further delay. We may not be ready, we may not feel that we are ready, but this next step we take in faith and trust that the Spirit will show us what we need 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 22: Receipt of minutes from the Children and Families and Young People's Programmes

We have received and heard read minutes from the groups of the Children and Families and Young People's Programmes of this Yearly Meeting as follows:

Children and Families Programme 0–7s Minute (YMG 2021)

The 0–7s children and families' group have met each morning this week for 45 minutes.

The children – from 9 months to 6 years old – have engaged well online taking everything in their stride.

We adapted Yearly Meeting Gathering themes to suit under 7s. We have been exploring ourselves, the world around us and what is important to and for each of us.

The children have shared who they are and what goes on in their own worlds – the games they play, their families, friends and what they enjoy doing. Their energy for life was shown in their eagerness to participate. They made trains out of Lego, Meccano, boxes and used their own train sets. They also made beautiful animals to go on their trains.

They made dens at home and brought their photos to show us. They made lollipop people and brought them back to show us. They shared who their little person was and what they are called. We made our contribution to COP26 with messages on green hearts to send to Glasgow.

The children used their imaginations in delightful and moving ways.

All engaged with short periods of worship as a time to reflect at the end of our sessions.

Families have expressed their appreciation of the quality and content of each session.

Being online has its restrictions but seeing the children's smiles and hearing their responses to the activities made it all worthwhile.

Light Explorers 7–9s Minute (YMG 2021)

Our theme this week was 'Let's explore the world and find out who we are'. Each day we got together on Zoom to explore different aspects of the theme by listening to stories, making things, chatting to each other, playing games, doing activities and worshipping together.

After hearing the story *You Be You* by Linda Franz, we reflected on what is unique about each of us. We liked what Adri the fish said, "There are so many of us! We all have something special that only we can share."

We have enjoyed painting rocks, making God's eyes and yummy fruit salad, and decorating family crests.

We thought about how we support the communities that we are part of and found out that between us we can lead and organise, have ideas, bring hugs and share facts, tell jokes, be logical and help our friends.

We watched and listened to a meditation from the Loving Earth Project. We could hear birds and the ocean waves. We thought about the world and had some ideas about how we can save our planet like planting flowers and buying fewer new things.

Being together, having fun and getting to know each other better has made us happy. We hope to meet each other in person in the future!

Spiritual Adventurers 9–11s Minute (YMG 2021)

We have had a great time and shared lots of things about ourselves. We have been creative and there has been lots of laughter. We have relaxed while thinking about our planet and used meditation to explore what needs saving.

We have loved going all over the world without leaving our houses!

We have read from ‘Living Our Beliefs’ and thought about our Faith in Action.



Britain Yearly Meeting Young People’s Programme at Online Yearly Meeting Gathering, 2–6 August 2021

25 friends gathered together for this week online, young people aged 11–15, and adult volunteers and staff. A peer arrangements committee worked with support to plan the event with the theme ‘Exploring Truth, finding Hope’.

Community building started early on, focussing on introductions, community boundaries and games both in base groups and the whole group. The base groups were a safer and smaller community to explore issues. As the week went on people became freer to contribute, a sign that they felt secure and welcome. Community building continued throughout the week through social games, activities and crafting.

We started the exploration of our theme through philosophy games with Rosie Carnall, considering truth through metaphors. We thought of truth as a cake deciding they should be straight forward and that we should see through the decoration to the truth. Truth should present its true self and might not be as palatable as we wish. Slices of truth cake should not be too big so we could eat the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

With Thomas Penny, the Swarthmore lecturer, we considered why we believe lies? Are the people who believe the lies as guilty as the people who tell them? Where do we get information from? How do we balance bias and what in our lives nurture the seeds of truth?

With Lee Lester we thought about active hope, what are our hopes for the world? How we keep hope and prevent activism burnout. We concluded by writing our own mission statements on how we wish to work in the world, recognising the skills we can bring including educating the world on climate change and equality, striving towards a better world and helping bring struggling communities out of conflict or poverty.

We explored different perspectives on the effect of climate change, deciding policy and actions need to be taken at a community level and hoping we can influence those decisions and ensuring we are aware of those who do not have a voice but are affected.

We worshipped together to start our sessions and in daily epilogue. We used different ways to help centre in worship and also used prepared ministry of words, images, music, film. The worship relaxed us and brought us together as a group; getting us ready and helping us take in the day.

This year's YPP required a different commitment, energy and motivation but our community still allowed us to persevere, explore, and have fun together.

Peter Foussat, Matthew Burnell, Seren Sim. Arrangements Committee Young People's Programme 2021

Minute 23: Epistle of Junior Yearly Meeting

We have received the epistle of Junior Yearly Meeting which has been read by the clerks of Junior Yearly Meeting, as follows:

Epistle of Junior Yearly Meeting

held on Gather Town

2–6 August 2021

As the Arrangements Committee of Junior Yearly Meeting this year, we would like to say how important this event is to us, the young people that attend each year, and to the community. JYM provides a space for young Quakers in Britain to feel a part of our beautiful and diverse Quaker community, a part of a family, but perhaps most importantly we feel like we have had our voices heard in the decision making process of an important Quaker body, something that young Quakers do not often feel outside of the event. It is for these reasons that when asked if we wanted to serve the JYM community for another year, we both knew we had to say yes.

The form that JYM took for the 2021 event broke from tradition, and this epistle is no different. We have divided the epistle into 2 parts: the first on behalf of Junior Yearly Meeting 2021, and the second on behalf of us, Kit and Sasha.

To all Friends everywhere,

From 2 August to 6 August 2021, 11 young Quakers, 2 Arrangements Committee members, and 6 Adult Team members met together in Gather Town, having created and designed our own unique space. We explored the theme 'For our comfort and discomfort: how can we use Quaker testimonies to live faithfully?', through the lens of anti-racism, climate justice, and other issues that intersect.

With the event being held online, there were concerns over the ability to foster community amongst the participants. However, we were extremely impressed by how quickly, easily, and organically, the community of young people came together and bonds formed. This ranged from small groups talking in 'private spaces', to post-epilogue conga lines with Clare Scott Booth. The surprising similarity to an in person event and use of the chat function allowed participants to engage more fully with theme sessions, in perhaps a more accessible fashion.

Throughout the week, Rachel Swancott, Edwina Peart, Beatrice Liese, and Daniel Nteziyaremye delivered sessions on a range of topics that allowed us to address the theme from different perspectives.

Rachel's session left us with a strong metaphor that carried us through the event: if your life is a boat, who makes up the crew? What role does Quakerism play – is it the wind in your sails or is it the anchor keeping you grounded? And finally, how is your boat equipped to make change in this world?

To start us thinking about race, racism, and how to navigate anti-racism Edwina Peart quoted Stuart Hall's book *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, saying that race is "one of those major or master concepts (the masculine form is deliberate) that organize the great classificatory systems of difference that operate in human societies. Race, in this sense, is the centerpiece of a hierarchical system that produces differences". It is this sense of "difference" that causes the issues we have with race in society today. She drew our attention to the racial abuse that the members of the England football team that are black, brown, or people of colour received after the final of the Euros and we heard Marcus Rashford's open letter about the abuse he received and the support from his teammates. This was extremely moving for many members, leading us to discuss the uncomfortable and comfortable aspects of the story, and what kind of world that we ourselves would like to create. She closed the session with a conversation about the links between modern racism, and how we are taught about colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. Participants particularly responded to the words of Professor Kehinde Andrews; "Society can only ever be as equal as the knowledge it is built upon".

We had 2 workshops led by Beatrice Liese from the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) and Daniel Nteziyaremye from Turning The Tide (TTT). Beatrice spoke to one small group about the work of QUNO in international negotiations, particularly about working towards climate justice. We then practiced Quiet Diplomacy – speaking from the heart, answering the question "What can I do to support myself and those around me to act on climate change?". Daniel gave an overview of the advocacy that TTT carries out with young people in Rwanda, their philosophy and methods for engagement, and encouraged us to think about issues that were local to British Quakers.

In the final theme session, we reflected on institutionalised racism within Quaker bodies, and the attitudes that allow it to go unchallenged, in preparation for our Meeting for Worship for Business. This allowed the participants to engage with the theme one last time and bring their thoughts to the front of their minds, ensuring that they attended with hearts and minds prepared.

Participants were enriched by Meetings for Worship at the beginning and end of each day, allowing space for all to be calm, reflective, and engaged with the Spirit. Themes of different worships included starfish, change for the common good, and remaining in touch with your conscience. In order to emulate the refreshing nature of prologue this was held on our beach, and to preserve the soothing nature of epilogue we gathered on the sofas of the virtual rooftop.

During the course of the event, we welcomed several guests – Paul Parker, Jasmine Peripanayagam, Clare Scott Booth, Rob Francis, Wendy Sender, and Ella Otomewi – who joined us for worship, story telling, base group sessions, and gave us their own perspective of the theme and how it relates to their Quakerism.

To keep us excited and energised, the evenings were filled by community sessions ranging from a retro game show themed quiz to a dress up drama. These sessions encouraged participants to let go and express themselves through performance and healthy competition. The high number of participants that opted to stay on during their break for optional community activities, such as crane making or a musical quiz, is a testament to how well the community formed despite being online. Our Adult Volunteers facilitated base group sessions which were at times very thought provoking, and at other times had debates on whether banana has a place on pizza.

This week has been an exciting week of learning; learning about the theme, learning about online events, and learning about ourselves as individuals and Quakers. We have been encouraged to engage in deep reflection and introspection from start to end, and we can leave this event content

in the knowledge that our participants have come away feeling equipped to make positive change in themselves, in our community, and in the wider world.

Signed in and on behalf of Junior Yearly Meeting 2021,

Kit King, Clerk and Sasha King-Smith, Arrangements Committee

To our participants,

We are extremely grateful to you all for making the decision to come to, yet another, online youth event as we are aware that the prospect of not having an in person JYM is not a particularly attractive one. You put your trust in us and the Quaker community that we could produce a fun and worthwhile event that includes you in wider Quaker society, and for that we thank you.

To Matthew Bittle, Grace Bach, and Gabriel Carter,

We started this journey as a group of five, with a different theme, a different venue, and no pandemic. Some of our original ideas, thoughts, and feelings remained in the planning for the event this week. We wanted to take this opportunity to recognise and give thanks for your input and remember the event we had pre-COVID.

To the Adult Volunteer team,

Thank you for supporting us during and in the run up to the event. From stepping in and taking the lead on base group sessions, to helping us in times of need, we are eternally grateful for stepping up and taking on roles that you did not originally sign up for.

Finally, To Cat Waithaka and Howard Nurden,

The last two years have not gone the way we expected them to, since we met at JYM 2019. This process has been transformative, insightful, and challenging to say the least. Howard, we thank you for the incredible work you have done, not just in the first phase of this process but the years you have spent working on the Children and Young People's Team, and we feel sorry that future AC's will not have the pleasure of receiving your guidance and experience. Cat, you have taught us about Quaker process, taught us more about ourselves than any self-help book could, and you have taught us to be mindful of all the different aspects that people contribute to a group which has allowed us to deliver this event. We have been your longest serving AC and yet it still feels like our time together has been cut short.

In 1991, the clerks of JYM wrote in their epistle "We realised that we are individuals and that we are alone but, as part of a loving community, to be alone does not necessarily mean to be lonely. [] We should not feel guilty when we are wrong, and appreciate that there must be room for mistakes." and 30 years later, these words are still true to JYM.

Signed,

Kit King, Clerk and Sasha King-Smith, Arrangements Committee

Minute 24: Minute from Junior Yearly Meeting

We have received minute 1 of Junior Yearly Meeting which reads as follows:

We considered the question “How can we become a Religious Society that centres justice and equity in it's anti-racism and climate justice work?”. As young Friends, we reflected that oftentimes, when discussing diversity in Quakerism, we use language that laments the absence of diverse Friends, without considering the root causes of why those people are not present in the first place. This root cause is often the fact that we are prioritising Diversity and Inclusion, over Equity and Justice.

People need to encourage conversations about the differences between diversity and equity, and inclusion and justice. Diversity tries to include a variety of people to make them seem as if they aren't discriminatory, but equity is about giving everyone the same opportunity. This means that anything can be adapted to ensure people are comfortable. Inclusion and justice here are opposites, as inclusion creates a general safe space. Justice, however, actively seeks out discomfort to ensure comfortability. Justice is okay with having uncomfortable conversations whereas inclusion is not.

Equity and justice address the root causes of these issues, rather than celebrating a result. As Quakers we need to understand that we are not exempt from racism because we wish to be anti-racist – it is our actions that will make a difference, not our intentions, since racism is so systemic that it's often subconscious. Therefore we must listen to how we can be more welcoming, and believe when we are told what issues we currently have, so that we can act accordingly.

We must listen not just to ourselves, but to others, to those outside our meeting, to those who may provide us with discomfiting truths, to those who have experienced racism or climate destruction first hand. For only when all are listened to equally, may all be treated equally.

To dismantle the prejudice present in our community, we must first dissect what makes us a society. Structural racism and bias is often subconscious but is present in most communities nonetheless. We must strive to make a difference to uphold our fundamental beliefs in all aspects of our society.

Minute 27: Review of Quaker Stewardship Committee

Further to minute 14 of Yearly Meeting 2018, which asked Meeting for Sufferings to review Quaker Stewardship Committee and its terms of reference, we receive minute MfS 20/10/12 of Meeting for Sufferings held 3 October 2020, and the accompanying report from the review group appointed by Meeting for Sufferings. The report is at appendix C in *Agenda and notes*, and has been introduced by the convenor of the review group.

We agree to lay down Quaker Stewardship Committee, with effect from the rise of Yearly Meeting 2022. We agree that its advice and guidance functions should be transferred to Quaker Life Central Committee. We have heard the need for support of Area Meeting trustees.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to take responsibility, on behalf of Yearly Meeting, for the oversight of certification of Area Meeting compliance responsibilities.

We ask Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees to take responsibility for liaising with the Charity Commission on matters of general concern to Quakers, and, working with General Meeting for Scotland, for liaison with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to agree the necessary factual alterations to [Quaker faith & practice](#) and to inform us, in accordance with minute 21 of Yearly Meeting 2019. We also ask them to lay down the review group.

We uphold those carrying out the work of transferring these responsibilities over the next year.

Minute 28: Review of the terms of reference for Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

Further to minute 35 of Yearly Meeting 2018, which asked Quaker Stewardship Committee to review the terms of reference for Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, we receive minute QSC 2020/09/04 of Quaker Stewardship Committee held 19 September 2020 along with the proposed revised terms of reference contained in the report at appendix C of *Agenda and Notes*. The review was carried out in conjunction with the review of Quaker Stewardship Committee and has been introduced by the convenor of the review group.

The group found that the overwhelming view was that Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees works successfully according to the current terms of reference, but that there was a need for greater clarity about the respective roles of Meeting for Sufferings and Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees in developing vision and strategic direction, as well as some other updating.

We affirm that Yearly Meeting in session retains its central role as the body with the ultimate authority for church affairs for Quakers in Britain.

“The intent and holy design of our annual assemblies, in their first constitution, were for a great and weighty oversight and Christian care of the affairs of the churches pertaining to our holy profession and Christian communion; that good order, true love, unity and concord may be faithfully followed and maintained among all of us” (Quaker faith & practice 6.03)

The different parts of our governance are inextricably intertwined and we know the importance of their working well together. We have opportunities to examine this when they report to us at Yearly Meeting. We acknowledge that there are unresolved tensions that impact on the role of Meeting for Sufferings and that their role may now need review. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to consider this and return to us.

We accept the revised terms of reference for Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, noting that further revisions are likely to be required as part of the revision of our book of discipline. We ask that they be reviewed again in 2026.

We ask for the charity governing document of Britain Yearly Meeting to be updated to reflect the changes made to the terms of reference and we authorise the Yearly Meeting Clerk to sign this on our behalf.

Minute 31: Acknowledging and Welcoming Gender Diverse People

Our testimony of equality stems from the religious conviction that all people are of equal spiritual worth, that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.

In 2003, Meeting for Sufferings responded to the Gender Recognition Bill, based on our testimony of equality, and encouraged Quaker Life Central Committee to promote the pastoral care of transgender people, their families, spouses and children, their friends and meetings. In 2015 the Tabular Statement started to record “Other” as well as men and women as one step to acknowledging the diversity among us. More recently, following consideration of trans and non-binary inclusion in a number of meetings, Quaker Life drafted an initial statement in 2018, inviting all Quakers in Britain to discuss and reflect together on gender diversity.

These discussions and reflections have not always been easy. Our consideration has coincided with wider consideration of legislation reform in Britain, and the associated conflict has been reflected among Friends in our yearly meeting. 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. 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 33: Faith-based action for climate justice

Friends across the world have long held a concern for us to live in right relationship with creation. We stand now, looking back at minutes from our own Yearly Meeting in 2011, from worldwide gatherings of friends in Kabarak and Pisac, and looking ahead to the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference taking place in Glasgow later this year. Events of recent weeks remind us that climate crisis is here, and that it affects us already. There is so much to lose, and so much to gain.

What more does love require of us here, and now?

To those gathering at COP 26 we offer our anger, our grief and our kinder ground, as well as our hope that they can share a vision of a better world. We ask them to renew and redouble their efforts, as we will do ourselves, giving no less than all we can to deliver a liveable planet and just societies.

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. 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 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. Eldership, building resilient communities, right ordering and witness are also fundamental parts of the actions we must take.

Climate justice is anti-racist work. The people most affected by the urgent and systemic crisis must be placed first in gaining this justice. If we have faith we will find many things to do but we cannot set the agenda without centering the experience and needs of people on the front line of climate change. Quakers in Britain must join with Friends and others across the world learning and acting together.

Can our anger, grief and love push us forward to renewed action?

Minute 35: For our comfort and discomfort: living equality and truth at a time of crisis

We have approached our theme of living equality and truth through three areas of focus: anti-racism, gender diversity and climate justice. We have been both comforted and discomforted. We

have recognised things that we have left undone and things that we ought not to have done and we have resolved to do the work to do better.

Junior Yearly Meeting asked us: How can we become a Religious Society that centres justice and equity in its anti-racism and climate justice work?

We need to love and listen humbly to one another, centering the voices of those who lack privilege. We can bring tools and stand alongside people rather than bringing solutions. We can learn anti-racism, anti-bias and anti-oppression techniques. We can listen and look for where the spirit is moving within other groups of like mind with whom we can work. We have Quaker experience to share, of holding space for people to listen.

If I can see you as other, I can ignore your lived experience, your pain, your truth – because that couldn't happen to me.

If I can see you as like me, it will be deeply discomfoting, but your truth and your pain become mine, and I can ally myself with you.

We need to strengthen our worshipping communities from which we all can draw strength for action and service to each other and in the world. We come to worship to meet God and to be changed.

We support and affirm the priority placed by QPSW central committee on work on sustainability and climate justice “In the face of overwhelming evidence of rapidly increasing destruction of the Earth, we are called to work for a world that prioritises ecological repair and well-being. To this end we will call for and work towards a just solution to the climate crisis; with national and worldwide economies operating within ecological limits and upholding the wellbeing, dignity and equality of all.” (QPSW strategy 2021–2025). We uphold Friends and staff travelling to Glasgow for COP 26 to make sure that call is heard.

We ask Quaker Life Central Committee to consider how best to support local and area meetings to work on cultivating an inclusive culture of welcome, and on developing a vision for what it means to be an anti-racist faith community.

We ask QWRC and QCCIR to consider how we can work with Friends around the world and with other churches and faith groups to take our work forward.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to receive and consider interim reports on our behalf and to share examples of successful practice.

We ask Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee to consider how and when we should return to these matters.

Minute 47: Concluding Minute

We have met, online, to keep our Yearly Meeting in turbulent times. For many, these have been times of bereavement, illness, anxiety, economic uncertainty and loneliness. Meeting online has enabled some Friends to attend Yearly Meeting for the first time. Some have embraced the technology; others have found it challenging. Many look forward with joy to seeing one another's faces in person once more. Our experience is that the Spirit has been undeterred in moving among us. Hallelujah!

“If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care – then do me a favour: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends.” (Philippians 2: 1–2, The Message)

May that holy and loving Spirit fill us with compassionate courage. May we truly build loving, inclusive and welcoming communities in which all can be heard, valued and supported in our needs and our leadings. May we listen deeply and may we be deep-spirited Friends.

There being no further business for the Yearly Meeting, we separate, hoping to meet again at Friends House, London, from 27–30 May 2022, should nothing occur to prevent.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clare Scott Booth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Clare Scott Booth, Clerk