

Meeting for Sufferings 2nd April 2016

Living out our faith in the world, which will also be the theme of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) this year, was a major item on our agenda at this Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) BYM 2015 forwarded issues arising from minute 36 2015 the call to equality to MfS for further consideration. The YM minute in particular asks:

‘...Meeting for Sufferings to take the work on social and economic injustice forward, co-ordinating the work of local and area meetings who might wish to become more deeply involved, and encouraging the deep spiritual and intellectual searching that could underpin a ‘true social order’ for our age.’

In preparation, MfS representatives were surveyed on action their meetings were undertaking under tested concerns, and a table was prepared of the minutes from AMs to MfS over the last two years that fell broadly into the category of equality. Stories of how some meetings were acting out their faith gleaned from the survey were tabled and are available via this link: www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/our-stories.

In an open plenary we were asked to address questions relating to the call for equality under 3 headings:

1. Responding to YM 2015
2. Testing concerns
3. Balancing and prioritising

MfS struggled with the notion of being responsible for co-ordination, and saw its role more as encouraging and providing networking among Friends. Various ways in which information can be shared and links made between Friends in different meetings were highlighted, including the vibrancy in meetings project, and the our stories strand on the website. We also considered how we test concerns, and what would help Friends with this. This too will be addressed at YM. The clerk felt it was important for representatives to have sufficient time to consider the issues, so balancing and prioritising was not addressed at this meeting.

Other items on the agenda included updating the court and prison register, a report from the BYM Trustees and the annual financial review, reports from the Friends World Consultative Council and minutes from AMs and central committees.

Trustees Report

Ingrid Greenhow, clerk of the BYM Trustees focused on issues of risk that had been a major item on their recent agenda. Trustees have a responsibility to carry out a risk assessment and manage the risks identified. In terms of reputational risk, Ingrid highlighted the use of the Q logo and whether the society has sufficient protection against its possible misuse by others. Apparently it is a piece of original artwork commissioned by BYM so we own the copyright. However, it was recommended that it be registered as a trademark as this offers a stronger form of legal protection than owning copyright.

Also highlighted were two other issues:

- i. the impact of the disruption likely to be caused by the development of HS2 in the area near the Meeting House and the importance of ensuring that Friends House is able to continue to function throughout the possible 10 year period of work.
- ii. the impact of the rising retirement age on the availability of members to undertake important roles within the Society.

Financial Review

Peter Ullathorne, the BYM Treasurer, reported that the 2015 accounts showed a "stable and reasonable position" He thanked Friends for financial contributions amounting to £2 million. He reminded us that we could achieve even more if we gave more and wondered whether we could aim for £3 million next year. He pointed out that the hospitality company covers most of the costs of the building, so additional income would directly affect the work we could do.

Minutes received from AMs and Central Committees

Minutes received covered a range of issues. The two outlined here are ones that AMs are asked to consider further.

Minute from Cornwall AM on the decriminalisation for personal use of all drugs

AMs are asked to consider Cornwall AM's minute calling for the decriminalisation of possession, for personal use, of all drugs. This is something that Cornwall AM has been working on for some time and a briefing paper is available (see <http://swquakers.org.uk/content/decriminalisation-possession-personal-use-all-drugs>) and relevant Cornish Friends can be contacted at qcorrespondent@gmail.com

Minute from QPSWCC commending a paper on 'a vision for a criminal justice system' for consideration.

QPSWCC hopes Friends will help test the vision expressed in the paper, which is available on www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/social-justice-2/crime-community-and-justice-2 AMs are asked to consider it, and to respond direct to Meeting for Sufferings who will return to it later in the year.

Quaker World Relations Committee (FWCC) Report

This committee, which was reconstituted recently with fewer members and new terms of reference, acts as a two-way conduit between BYM and Quakers worldwide. One of its major tasks over the last year has been preparing representatives for the FWCC plenary that took place in Peru in January and ensuring that the learning from this event is taken forward within BYM. To this end there is to be a conference entitled 'Living the transformation' at Woodbrooke 16-18 September based on the learning from the FWCC World Plenary.

FWCC International Representatives Meeting World Plenary: Consultation on Sustainability

The FWCC Plenary Meeting asks all Yearly Meetings to initiate at least two concrete actions on sustainability within the next twelve months; to support individuals and groups in their meetings; and to support the work being done by Quaker organisations.

The Plenary Meeting also asks individual Friends and Quaker Meetings to share inspiring experiences of living sustainably, through the 'Quakers in the World' website.

(www.quakersintheworld.org)

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