

York Area Meeting

Meeting for Sufferings Report

(10th July 2021)

A report of some of the items from Meeting for Sufferings Saturday 10th July 2021. The whole of the day's agenda, papers and minutes can be found in full at

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/papers-and-minutes>

QFP 23:10 read out in the opening worship set the tone of the day.

*'We need both a deeper spirituality and a more outspoken witness. ... Out of the depths of authentic prayer comes a longing for peace and a passion for justice. And our response to violence and injustice is to pray more deeply, because **only God can show us the way out of the mess the world is in.***

And only God can give us the strength to follow that Way.'

(Gordon Matthews, 1989)

Covid and our Quaker Witness

It was inevitable that this Meeting for Sufferings reflected the impact of Covid on our Quaker witness and in particular on Friends House and its various Central Committees. One could not help admiring the way in which the BYM Trustees has steered the charity through a challenging time. A figure from the BYM Trustees report stood out for me.

By 2023 a third of BYM's expenditure has to be cut in order for the charity to stay afloat. Although Area Meetings do support British Yearly Meeting and their Central Committees' work, the amount we contribute needs to be increased.

Due to the Quiet company which runs hospitality at Friends House not operating at full capacity this past year, there has been a loss in income. This has had an impact on Quaker work.

QPSW's work for example has felt this loss of income keenly. One of the areas Friends noted as a casualty of this process was the support of the work of the Criminal Justice System. Some Friends have thought that this work was being laid down judging by various Minutes from Area Meetings. Reassurance was given that it is being reassessed and will probably morph (restructure) into a different way of doing the work.

The commitment of the committee (QPSWCC) that sets the strategy of QPSW remains as a Quaker commitment to: Prison Chaplains and Visitors, the Crime, Community and Justice programme and a project (Bake the Difference) which provides training for ex-offenders.

Meeting for Sufferings will need to see how this works out in future meetings. For more details, please see the link at the beginning of the report.

As a result of the loss of income this past year a first question is raised:

Do we support the central work of BYM sufficiently in our giving as an Area Meeting so as to support Central Committees' work?

Meeting for Sufferings and Young Adult Quakers

I found it interesting hearing about the project which is nearing the end of its funding to increase the participation of Young Adult Quakers in Meeting for Sufferings.

Their path to being a representative on Meeting for Sufferings is not straightforward as they may be a child or teenager of one Area Meeting and then go onto university or College in another Area meeting or start a job in another and then finally live in another. We were challenged to think outside the box and be open to the fact that they may not come through the conventional way of being nominated.

Some feedback given was for Area Meetings to consider nominating a younger representative or alternative onto Meeting for Sufferings and to consider setting up a mentoring scheme to help new representatives settle in. Age diversity on Meeting for Sufferings was noted as an aspiration in this context.

A second question arises as a consequence:

Can we as an Area Meeting think of suitable young people who might be considered for nomination for Meeting for Sufferings and can we suggest these names to the Area Meeting Nominations team?

Quaker Life

The last item of the day was the strategy of Quaker Life, a key central committee. Of interest to York AM was that we have a new Development Worker called Bridget Holtom funded by BYM and we are encouraged to approach her for any support in one of the following areas: building Meetings for Worship as the bedrock of Quaker life, Quaker community and Quaker discipline. (From “*Our Faith in the Future*” publication).

A third question therefore is:

Is there anything in our Area Meeting which we could benefit from approaching our local Development Officer to help us with at this time?

Representing York AM

In conclusion, this particular meeting concluded my second triennium; the first triennium was as a representative and the second was as an alternate.

I thank the Area Meeting Nominations’ team who approached me to give me this wonderful opportunity to gain an insight into the working of Quakers at a national level. My late father tried to sum up Meeting for Sufferings from the perspective of someone outside the Society by likening it to a ‘collective Pope’. I am not sure he got it fully or was just pulling my leg but the word ‘collective’ has reflected my experience.

I felt like I was part of a community and even more so, ironically, on Zoom.

I would like to welcome John Bourton as the new alternate and to thank Barbara Penny for her wonderful support to me since becoming the representative for Meeting for Sufferings.

Sarah Allen (Alternate for York AM)