Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) 6 July 2019

Yearly Meeting Reviewed

MfS began with a reading from Quaker Faith and Practice: ‘What is important is that institutions and their administration be constantly tested against human values, and that those who are concerned about these values be prepared to grapple with the complex realities of modern society as it is’ (Grigor McClelland 1976). Former representatives who had died since the last MfS were remembered: eleven names were read out.

The Court and Prison Register was read out – much activity has resulted from Extinction Rebellion.

Sustainability

The Sustainability Monitoring Group oversees corporate action of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and MfS calls on all Friends to consider how we become a low carbon, sustainable community. This work is ongoing. There will be an update of progress in October.

Gender Diversity and related issues

Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM) and Quaker Life Central Committee (QLCC) both sent submissions to MfS. Friends present shared their life experiences, illustrating their difficulties and pain in being excluded from family or friends due to sexuality, simply not accepted at that time. Many individuals are now transitioning to a sex they feel is appropriate – schools are aware of this. The question of gender, and the sympathetic treatment of individuals, is very significant. This really matters – ‘trans’ people are in turmoil, and the pain and difficulty spreads out to family, friends, colleagues. We should be tolerant and supportive, and extend a welcome to all. We should not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Beyond Vibrancy

Caroline Nursey, Clerk to BYM Trustees, talked about plans to decentralise the work of Friends, cutting down on administration and duplication . Local development workers (LDWs) as part of the Beyond Vibrancy pilot, have been very successful. The plan is to have more workers supporting local meetings.

There was much discussion about the experience of some meetings covering a wide geographical area, such as the Isle of Man or rural Scotland. One speaker said that LDWs were leading us to ‘paid pastors’, something Caroline disagreed with. We have to plan for the future, building in strength and outreach, and investing in approaches, possibly very different to our traditional approaches.

Young People’s participation – looking afresh at the way we do things.

We need to work towards greater participation of young people, widening activities to draw them in. It is not only Quakers who lose the teens – this is common to many worship groups. We must value and cherish the contribution of young Quakers, and develop their experiences of Quakerism so that it becomes essential in their lives.