

AM Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) Report from March 2022 Meeting.

Oliver Robertson (Head of Worship and Witness at Britain Yearly Meeting)

spoke to those attending MfS at this time of trouble, when the situation in Ukraine was in everyone's thoughts. We were all thinking of the Russian incursion on 24 February and subsequent events.

Oliver went on to say, 'We aren't necessarily called to be amazing. We are called to be faithful'. What should we do? We should faithfully maintain 'our testimony that war and the preparation for war are inconsistent with the spirit of Christ'.

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, was quoted as saying: 'War today is the failure of yesterday that leads to unimaginable human suffering on all sides. Imagine what would happen if we were willing to invest as much in peace as we currently do in preparing for war.'

MfS took place from 4-6 March, and was a blended meeting. Online Friends numbered 71, and 47 Friends were present in Friends House.

Update from BYM Trustees

Caroline Nursey, Clerk to BYM, talked about working towards its three priorities

- Thriving Quaker communities
- A sustainable peaceful world
- Simpler structures and practices

Much of the work is now being done by Local Development Workers. A new 'Faith in Action' team was pursuing a sustainable, peaceful world, formed from staff in Quaker Peace & Social Witness and the BYM Communications Team. Simplification work was happening locally but also included new financial systems and an intranet.

Caroline responded to a Friend who brought up BYM staff feeling insecure after the restructuring. She said that most restructuring was complete and there were no further plans for redundancies. MfS has a special responsibility for sustainability.

Non-geographic membership is under discussion – this presents some interesting problems.

Review of Yearly Meeting (YM)/Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG)

We considered a wide collection of topics: purposes: worship, business, decision-making learning, inspiration and being in community. Sometimes there is a disconnect between different decision-making bodies.

'YM is the most important Meeting for Worship for Business that there is.' Some Friends find the 'busyness' and the groups difficult.

There was consideration of a review of MfS – should the review of MfS be combined with YM and YMG? Can MfS be reviewed without a corresponding review of BYM trustees? **Margaret Bryant**, Clerk of MfS, said that this had already happened.

Simplification Carolyn Hayman of BYM trustees said this work needs to connect with other structural reviews. Participation – four ways, functions not bodies:

- Conscience (governance of issues like racism or same-sex marriage)
- Stewardship (resources)
- Planning
- Diplomacy (sharing the Light with others)

Central Nominations Committee – fill in a form for service you could provide. This is a way of getting new members onto Committees. There is an urgent need for new voices.

The next phase of work will be to look at alternative models to fulfil these functions.

Analysis of data gathered from workshops, has formed the basis of the research. Participants came from Scotland, Wales and BYM, with a fair spread geographically (and not London-centred). Both MfS and BYM Trustees will need to report on progress of simplification to YM in May 2022, in preparation for decisions which will be required at YM in 2023.

The report for Meeting for Sufferings 2021 ('what we did') was presented.

Reporting arrangements for QCCIR and QWRC

Oliver Robertson (Head of Worship and Witness at Britain Yearly Meeting), spoke to us on this issue.

BYM is represented externally by two standing committees

- Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR)
- Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC)

Formerly these two reported to BYM Trustees. The plan is that the two committees will be accountable to Friends via MfS. Changes are being made to the terms of reference to enable these committees to draw upon the gifts, experience and willingness to serve of a wider group of Friends. MfS agreed to ask this change for approval by Yearly Meeting in session.

Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) Changes

Oliver Robertson reported on the new strategy for our faith in action work:

- greater focus on peace and climate justice
- More connected to other parts of QPSW and to Quakers more widely
- More responsive to developing leadings of Friends
- Staff restructure to deliver on that strategy.

What QPSW will work on

One part of QPSW is a large Campaigns, Advocacy and Faith in Action Team. Alongside this team are projects with independent objectives – currently

- Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)
- Peace Education
- Peacebuilding in Britain and East Africa
- Conciliation
- Quaker Housing Trust secretary function.

'Crime, Community and Justice' has been discontinued, but parts of this work may be carried on by other Quaker groups. 'Sanctuary Everywhere': Sanctuary Meetings are to be supported by Faith in action staff, and further activities may be incorporated into peacebuilding in Brit

Suggested changes to Quaker Faith and Practice

MfS approved changes to Chapter 16 of Quaker Faith and Practice, to allow changes in procedure in accordance with the revised registration of marriage in England and Wales.

Use of the term 'overseer'

Use of this terminology is to be considered, and AMs are encouraged to experiment in finding alternatives.

MfS – summarised in The Friend 11 March and 18 March 2022.