

General Meeting for Scotland, 16th November, 2019

Minute 19/11/07 Minutes received from Area Meetings

We receive the following minutes from ESAM, SESAM and NSAM

19.08.02 Improving our ways of working ESAM

At General Meeting in March 2019, we addressed the question: "Scottish Quakers: how do we liberate ourselves to focus on spiritual growth, community building and witness to the world?"

Today, the Clerk has introduced discussion on ways of working more effectively. We considered different areas, including training and support for role holders, improved efficiency and what we considered was our core purpose and key roles.

Our suggestions include:

- Focusing on our core purpose, our spirit-led community, based on 'Our Faith in the Future' – can we make communications work better to allow the spirit to flow through us?
- Developing ideas such as 'buddies' to support role holders and thinking creatively of different ways of eldering and oversight.
- Developing practical ways to improve workings, for example a standardised accounting system, this could be done initially across Scotland.
- Support for training in video conferencing, such as 'Zoom' which is said to be easy to learn.
- Making the nominations process more transparent.

We will forward this minute to General Meeting.

2019/09/11 SESAM General Meeting for Scotland – 'menu for change'

Our clerk has presented an outline of the menu for change agreed at General Meeting for Scotland in March and has drawn our attention to the points most relevant to our situation in South East Scotland.

Key issues highlighted include:

- How we bring in, and bring on, newcomers – eg through social events, learning opportunities, and equipping ourselves through skills development
- Building community within our meetings (see minute 2019/06/11 for our discussion of how Kelso meeting approaches this) – eg through events, having fun, eating together
- What can we do jointly with other AMs? – eg sharing certain roles, sharing training
- Developing our meetings – what can we do to stabilise fragile meetings, to seed new meetings? And should we be reviewing all our meeting places, owned or rented to see if they are in the right location, with the right facilities?

- Communicating – *eg* using 'Zoom' to cut down on travel; how we use our websites and social media; and our use of print media.

We recognize the shortage of time to discuss these issues fully.

We encourage AM Trustees in their consideration of how to spend our legacy funds and ask them to include the possibility of using them to develop a vibrancy approach.

We note that issues of how Area Meeting is organised and held will be discussed further at our November meeting, when we review three years' experience of the STIR proposals of 2016.

We ask the clerk to send this minute to General Meeting for Scotland.

We thank the clerk for his presentation.

NSAM

Area Meeting review 67/19 We have considered the review of Area Meeting carried out by the listening Group in 2017. and considered where we are now in 2019: • We have made more of our Area Meetings residential in style; • We have a planning committee to help organise AM's including our annual residential AM at Pluscarden; • NSQT has been laid down and we have one group of trustees instead of 2; • We have laid down the search group & E/Os are tasked with finding names for Nominations Committee; • We have taken on and paid for additional finance support to make the treasurers role less onerous; • 2 local meetings became worship groups (Nairn & Banchory) and there are worship groups in Dingwall, Brora and Caithness; • Forres Local Meeting now meets every Sunday; • We have tested and will continue to test the effectiveness of video conferencing, noting that the AM planning committee has asked GM to advise on the most appropriate VC to use.

Minute 19/11/08 Scottish Quakers: How do we liberate ourselves to focus on spiritual growth, community building and witness in the world?

Our clerk has introduced us to the work already completed on this issue. We have moved not smaller groups to consider the suggestions made by Area Meetings.

We ask our treasurer to free up a sum of money (suggested £1000) from the Jenny Auld legacy for the purposes of our following actions:

Communications

We agree to strengthen our GM Communications Group (Joyce Taylor, Ann Kerr, Anna Mitchell) which has been working for nearly a year by asking them to co-opt a few new members to include Friends from all Area Meetings. GM clerks will assist in this co-option. We ask the group to report to report to GM in March.

Role Holder Support

We ask our GM clerks and GM trustees to explore how best we might support and enable our role holders across Scotland.

We ask that GM clerks together with clerks of GM working groups consider how to enable yearly gatherings for role holders to share their learning and concerns on a rolling basis.

Community Building

Community building has been a strong theme throughout this discussion. We can all see the value in strengthening our relationships through shared meals and social events all age activities etc. We see value in GM providing a space for Friends to share their experiences and ideas on community building. We ask our clerks to work on this for us and report to a future GM.

Collated reports from the small groups

COMMUNITY BUILDING

We are all nurtured in community and we need to be supported in building/ sustaining the diversity and inclusion of our communities. How do we meet with one another individually and also group to group? We should have more social events and sharing food informally. Being willing to visit people and meeting in small worshipping groups builds community. Distance is a practical problem but it should be looked at creatively. Do we need to provide finances for travelling and have a pot of money readily available/ accessible?

How can we grow our Meetings? We need to recognise that within our Meetings we are all on journeys and at different times/ stages on this journey we have different needs. To help newcomers we might offer buddies, formal information, run Becoming Friends sessions regularly and help interpret Quaker customs and jargon, which can be a barrier. As alternatives to Meeting for Worship, some people find it easier to attend residential community events, such as Shindig. These are learning opportunities and draw us together. Is there a case for allowing Quakers to invite non-Quakers to such events? Might more national meetings/ gatherings help our revival? Should we have a visible presence outside the meeting, in our wider community?

Our Quaker work gives us the opportunity to engage everyone, thus helping to build community. All-age worship including all-age business meetings helps bring us together. We need to learn to listen to each other. The ministry of our young people and children can be enlightening. Might we introduce the practice of sending a rolling epistle around all the Meetings, like some monasteries do?

We are a spirit led community and would benefit from regular spiritual reviews.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is the key to building a spirit led community but in Scotland, distance hinders it and Quakers have an “inequality of presence”.

Social media, phoning others and personal letters help to make all meetings feel included and to support isolated Friends. We can use remote communications like ZOOM to speak to each other but this might also disconnect people from community, therefore there needs to be a balance with face-to-face meetings. Remote systems of communication need to be easy to use and training may be needed. Should we have an experienced Elder on social media to help people who need support?

How do our young people know about the things which are going on which might interest them? Can we improve communications with them? Letters, advertisements of where meetings are based and Quaker websites have served us well and are still useful but in simple ways, we can 'modernise' and reach a wider and younger public by spreading awareness of Quakers and what we are doing on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Whats app.

We also need targeted communications, in particular about nominations. Transparency about our processes is vital. A simple leaflet on the nominations process and from time to time, a member of GM Nominations Committee talking about their work, would help. Everyone needs to know about vacant roles. Details should be sent to all Meetings and put on the website. Nominations Committee representatives and LM clerks have a key role in passing on this information.

SUPPORT FOR ROLE HOLDERS

We need to identify and encourage each others' gifts and tackle our 'busyness'.

Role holders gain support from communicating with each other and especially with those who are more isolated. It is critical to hold meetings of role holders and to build support networks across AMs, to link people doing similar Quaker work. We need to talk more about our roles. Role buddies help, especially when someone is considering taking on a role.

Training for roles is needed. There could be a mixture of face-to-face training and on-line training.

In our traditional roles, there are too many layers/ hierarchies. We need to simplify this structure and ask if a role is necessary before trying to fill it. Can there be more shared roles? Having joint Elders/ Overseers helps in smaller meetings with geographical problems.

Keeping accounts can be too much for small Meetings. Can we have a standardised accounting system across AMs and LMs? Standard procedures are also useful for the things we have to do because we are a charity. Property is still a problem for some Meetings. Using professional services might help with certain tasks, like the care of buildings.