**GENERAL MEETING FOR SCOTLAND**

**To YM Agenda Committee, 16 Sept. 2023**

**What might be brought before the Yearly Meeting in 2024?**

We are meeting the same day, and we will be holding you in our prayers and thoughts as we meet in in Inverness and online. We hope the comments below give you context to your wider discernment.

**What is moving amongst Meetings in Scotland, and might help us by exploration at Yearly Meeting**

* A feeling that blended/hybrid worship is causing some problems in maintaining depth and community, despite its significant opportunities for inclusion and support. Sharing experience of what works in both regards might be useful. Concentrating on what works for gathered worship might help us strengthen community and witness.
* Finding ways of commitment that works for the current situation. Our business meetings don’t always seem to be the core of our communities and are not attracting, in the main, new and younger Friends. How do we maintain our Quaker insights into how our communities work to balance power and inclusion whilst making them accessible and relevant? We are working towards different structures in order to adapt to where we are now. Some sharing of similar adaptation may be helpful at our Yearly Meeting. How do we work to our vision and witness in ways that reinforces our faith and community? This may include a look at how we learn from each other about Quaker foundations in a way that reaches us all. Hearing from Woodbrooke on its vision might be useful.
* Using paid staff to leaven our witness is proving very successful in raising awareness of Quakers and opportunities for shared work and community building. The presence of our Parliamentary Engagement Officer and our Local Development Worker are helping to build up confidence in our meetings. The way they work is a good and developing model. Is it the right time to share this sort of use of our resources to encourage it further? What sort of leadership do we need and how do we obtain it?
* How do we witness in a time of increasing populism and apparent intolerance to the perceived threats to our society, as shown by the recent Westminster laws enacted that we and others have opposed. Some issues have shown us that we are not immune to seeing only one ‘right’ way. How do continue to listen to each other’s experience?
* All these are interlinked and to do with living our Quaker experience together.

**Background: where we are**

Some extracts from recent minutes of General Meeting to give context to the above.

***How are we feeling about our Quaker community? How are our Quaker Meetings being sustained?***

*Zoe (Prosser) spoke to us about some of the things she has seen through her Local Development Worker role. It is important to acknowledge that there is a lot of mourning going on, through the loss of dear and loved Friends and through the changes that we see, with potential loss, in our Quaker community (for example the closure of Woodbrooke Quaker study Centre). We can show tiredness, be overstretched, and worry about questions like “who will do the job?” and “what will happen if no one does it?” The weight of the “should” is being carried – in the sense of feeling that we should all be doing more to uphold the community. This can all be dispiriting.*

*We know that communities can be many things at once: both a respite and a burden, and showing both hope and fear. A worry comes as we see the importance of what has been built up that we don’t want to lose. We live in a time of fear; for our communities, our world, our planet. This can be reflected in our meetings too, so we have to be responsive to each other.*

*But here is a lot of hope in our communities as well. Clear successes have happened: younger Friends are coming in, there is rejuvenation of Local Meetings; new people are joining us following the pandemic. There are new ways of doing things; new ways to connect to each other in a spirit of worship.*

*Everywhere she looks, Zoe sees signs of Spring. During our time of worship sharing together this was echoed by Friends, giving instances of the hope they see and how inspired they are being within our wider Quaker community. Having this sense of hope underpins where we are together: times move on but change doesn’t always mean loss. We may have lost Woodbrooke as a centre, but not as a learning resource, and it can come to Scotland to help us. There are more groups working for positive change: people are rising with a vision of what we hope for. Friends spoke of being so grateful for the support given in our communities, by others with us who are engaged with our meetings, working groups and out in the world.*

*We do have struggles in adapting to change, but we are looking at it head on, taking advantage of what is possible by taking responsibility for our future together. We have flexibility, as has been seen how we use new opportunities like Zoom. We look after each other and share our experiences. There is growth all around us, despite our difficulties.*

*Today we recognise that we can be a community of transformation as we look to adapt to the change all around us. It won’t be easy, and there will be challenging and questioning. But we have each other. We need to think through how we do things, but we have the resource of each other to draw upon. Younger Friends inspire us and show us ways forward, and the rest of us can nurture them in turn.*

*The flowers are coming up all around us and we do have hope.*

***Options for (Quaker structures in) Scotland***

We are working to see if we should/can form *a single body, ‘Quakers in Scotland’ through which we support all our Local Meetings, where our membership is held and which enables us to speak, as Quakers, on Scotland wide issues. ……..One Friend expressed how we wrestle with the words “faith, trust, hope, realism and practicalities” in relation to the issues before us. We are aware of the real and current difficulties facing us all in maintaining existing structures and of the responsibilities we have for each other.*

**Hearing from the Quaker Truth & Integrity Group (QTIG)**

*We have engaged with (the QTIG speaker), noting we need to maintain standards of truth and integrity ourselves as well as asking others to do so.*

***Through our parliamentary engagement wor****k, we seek to influence the Scottish Government and Parliament on matters of concern to Quakers in Scotland. The current work of the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group (PEWG) and the Parliamentary Engagement Officer (PEO) is broadly focused on three areas of concern: peace and peacebuilding; the climate emergency; economic justice and land reform. At each General Meeting, we are updated on this work.*

*A recent contribution by a Friend to Time for Reflection at the Parliament ‘Are we being good ancestors’ can be heard* [*here*](https://www.scottishparliament.tv/meeting/time-for-reflection-april-25-2023)*.*

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Our message for YMAC last year is still relevant:

* In these turbulent times, we need to continue to witness for peace and justice and to build an understanding of the inter-connectedness of the issues that concern us.
* Our Quaker advocacy is important. We need to speak up.
* As the spirit that sustains and leads us is universal, we need to work with others.
* We need to put our house in order, freeing us to focus on our worship and our witness.

With good wishes for your discernment.

Michael Hutchinson

Clerk, General Meeting for Scotland