

Possible arrangement for Spiritual and Pastoral care

We offer these thoughts as suggestions of how eldership and pastoral care might be offered within Quakers in Scotland. This proposal is not a final plan, but is expected to evolve as Friends discover what is most helpful. We would encourage Friends to set up or dismantle processes, as they are led. The responsibilities are held at national level, but there will be situations when regional or other groupings will be helpful.

Spiritual Care

Names of Friends to serve as elders would be forwarded from local meetings and worshipping communities to the QiS nominations committee. This committee would consider if there was an appropriate spread in terms of geography and of experience, also checking on safeguarding and PVG where relevant. The appointments would be made by QiS to emphasise that they serve the whole body and their responsibilities go beyond the Friends' local meeting or worshipping community.

Regular meetings for all elders would replace the current area meeting elders' meetings which would consider their responsibilities across the whole of Scotland. The more informal network sessions co-ordinated by the Local Development Worker could also continue. In addition to this, there could be a place for subgroups of elders offering support and expertise in particular issues; for example, there could be support groups for funerals, learning, supporting Local Meetings or supporting young adult Friends. There might be other groupings, perhaps those working with local meetings or worshipping communities in large cities, or those in geographically isolated groups. Any such subgroups could be set up, but it is important that the 'wear it as long as thou cans't' principle is applied so it is recognised that these groups can be laid down or reformed as they are needed.

Elders will continue to be responsible for spiritual learning including ensuring Friends understand how our religious society works. Part of this would include the basic understanding of nominations, eldership, pastoral care and clerkship.

Pastoral Care

Friends need to be clear what we are offering in relation to pastoral care. There are many types of care that are not within our remit and not appropriate for us to offer. We are only responsible for that care which relates to a Friend's life as a Quaker, that which relates to meeting. There is a difference between what might be offered by a personal friend and that which is appropriate from a pastoral carer. In some situations, confidentiality is important.

Meetings across Scotland have a variety of practice relating to pastoral care. It is important that every meeting and worshipping group agrees how pastoral care will be carried out in their community. They are then in a position to decide on a way of providing this care that suits their situation.

We propose that pastoral care is mostly kept at the local meeting level, with pastoral care Friends appointed by the local meeting as discerned. We propose the setting up of a pastoral care support committee of QiS consisting of about 5 Friends appointed by QiS, to provide support to meetings on pastoral care issues where needed.

Local meetings would be asked for a regular report on 'This is how we are doing pastoral care', to ensure the matter is kept under review. These could be passed on to the pastoral care support committee for their information. The current network sessions could evolve into a pastoral care drop-in session to provide further support.

Other linked issues:

Isolated Friends and local meetings

Quakerism is not a congregational church; the contacts between worshipping communities are important. Ensuring that all Friends, from both large and small meetings, are in contact with Friends from elsewhere is an important part of the role of elders and pastoral carers. The geography of Scotland presents particular challenges in achieving this. Appreciating that every Quaker community has its own idiosyncrasies and differences allows us to develop a wider understanding of the richness and diversity within our religious society.

Membership

Membership will be held by Quakers in Scotland and through this of the Religious Society of Friends. The way in which applications for membership is handled in essence will be the same, but the administration of the processes can change. Friends felt applications for membership was best handled by those fairly local to the person involved, therefore it might involve intermediate meetings (see separate document on intermediate meetings). The tradition is usually that two visitors are appointed, one known to the applicant and one from another meeting. Arranging this at an intermediate level makes this easier. Handling transfers at an intermediate meeting makes it easier to ensure Friends are welcomed into the community. If there is no appropriate Intermediate Meeting where this sort of business could be taken taken, then applications and transfers would be considered at QiS. Resignations are slightly different as they might involve situations where there is a problem involving the local meeting; these would be considered at a meeting at QiS, with the early involvement of elders.

Weddings

It would be possible, if Friends wished, to operate with just one registering officer and an assistant. Some preliminary meetings already take place on Zoom. We would need to be mindful of the need for the registering officer to travel for the wedding itself.