



Aug 23

# Scottish Friend



Photograph 1: Rothiemurchus estate, near Coylumbridge.

Scottish Friend is distributed by Sue Proudlove, on behalf of the General Meeting for Scotland.

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## From your editor

Friends, I would like to thank all the contributors for their generosity and offer my apologies for the missing June edition.

I sat one morning in silence on the train, reading something when I came across the last editorial for a journal *Learning for Living* (now renamed as the *British Journal of Religious Education*), written by Harold Loukes. It immediately reminded me of the following:



*Prayer is experienced as deeper than words or busy thoughts. 'Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts', said Fox. It is marked by a kind of relaxed readiness, a 'letting-go' of the problems and perplexities with which the mind is occupied, and a waiting in 'love and truth': the truth about oneself, the truth about the world, deeper than the half-truths we see when we are busy in it about our own planning and scheming, the love in which we are held when we think of others more deeply than our ordinary relations with them, the love that at root holds us to the world. Prayer is not words or acts, but reaching down to love: holding our fellows in love, offering ourselves in love; and being held by, being caught up in love. It is communion, an opening of the door, an entry from the beyond. This is the point where secular language fails, for this cannot be spoken about at all: it can only be known. Quaker faith & practice 2.23.*

Harold was a remarkable teacher having taught at St Stephen's College in Delhi and then at Oxford. Throughout his career he wrote articles and books, which provide a glimpse of how he enriched the lives of others around him. It certainly got me into a quiet contemplation mode.

In this edition, as before we have reports from the previous GMs, reports from other churches and other submissions. I do hope you enjoy reading the contributions.

*In Friendship  
Amer*

# 1 GM affairs

## 1.1 Calling for General Meeting for Scotland Michael Hutchinson, GM Clerk

Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all!

**Our next General Meeting will be on the 16<sup>th</sup> September, in Inverness and online.**

The third of four meetings scheduled for this year, it will be a 'blended' or 'hybrid' meeting, with some Friends present at the Methodist Church, Huntly St, Inverness IV3 5PR, and others joining by Zoom. **After preliminary refreshment at the church from 10:30 am, we will start with open worship at 11.00, break for lunch from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm, and our afternoon session will finish about 4.00 pm.**

We will be sending details of the arrangements, including details of how to register and join in, in due course. **Please do come! All are welcome. Inverness Friends will be providing a catered lunch for those coming in person, so there is no need to bring food. Early registration will be very helpful so Inverness Friends can order the correct amount beforehand.**



We will be sending details of the arrangements, including details of how to register and join in, in due course. **Please do come! All are welcome. Inverness Friends will be providing a catered lunch for those coming in person, so there is no need to bring food. Early registration will be very helpful so Inverness Friends can order the correct amount beforehand.**

This is an opportunity to meet in person and virtually with Friends from across Scotland. We worship together and in a spirit of worship we attend to our church affairs, and matters concerning the spiritual life and witness of Quakers in Scotland.

The introduction to Advices & queries reminds us that *As Friends we commit ourselves to a way of worship which allows God to teach and transform us. We have found corporately that the Spirit, if rightly followed, will lead us into truth, unity and love: all our testimonies grow from this leading. We can worship alone, but when we join with others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. This applies to our business meetings as much as any other.*

At this General Meeting, our emphasis will be to follow through from our June meeting on the Options for Scotland 2 Working Group report and recommen-

dations on the future structure for Quakers in Scotland. This fundamentally affects the way we act as communities of faith. The Options2 working group will report to us on the idea for a single Quaker charity in Scotland, to replace six sets of trustees. We will need to discern how much more we wish to see developing. All four Area Meetings will be letting us know what they are thinking. We intend to give over nearly all the morning for this matter.

Other business, mainly in the afternoon, will be to hear from our Parliamentary Engagement Working Group, including its work for climate justice, considering our work with children and young people (including the Shindig report), and catching up on the Enquiries days and other engagement. We'll also receive nominations and deal with other business to keep Friends' work and witness in Scotland going. Zoe Prosser will help us consider the process of deciding priorities for her work as Local Development Worker.

Papers and the draft agenda will be circulated by email about ten days prior to GM. If you do not receive them, please ask our Administrator, Sue Proudlove, for a copy ([scotfriends@gmail.com](mailto:scotfriends@gmail.com)). If you have any questions, please contact me, your clerk, by email [scotfriends@gmail.com](mailto:scotfriends@gmail.com) or telephone 0141 770 7865.

The following General Meeting will be blended again on 11<sup>th</sup> November, physically in Perth.

Michael Hutchinson,  
Clerk,  
Susan Mitchell,  
Assistant Clerk.  
General Meeting for Scotland.



Photograph 2: Methodist Church, Inverness. The venue of GM in September.

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## 1.2 Report of the General Meeting for Scotland in March Carolyn Burch, North Scotland AM

As is now usual the meeting was ‘blended’ with 26 Friends present in person in Glasgow and almost 50 online: a high turnout and, although we still feel a pang at not all being together, we are glad that technology allows travel-free attendance, and the inclusion of Friends for whom the option of home-based attendance is a great bonus.

But we do celebrate being increasingly able to get together in person, one great example of this being the **Families weekend** 5-7 May at Pitlochry, organised by Mary Troup and the Children & Young Peoples’ Advocates group. Last year’s weekend was much appreciated by all who were there, and we hope this will be another step in strengthening our all-age Quaker community in Scotland. The proposed theme will be Peace at the Heart, to link the weekend with Quakers in Britain Peace at the Heart report, the associated Teach Peace pack and the travelling Living Exhibition which will be at the Scottish Parliament from 26 - 28th September 2023.

Friends around Scotland are being encouraged to host the Peace at the Heart exhibition in their own Area and our Local Development Worker Zoe Prosser is liaising with AMs. Meanwhile the Parliamentary Engagement Group (PEWG) is focusing on arrangements with the Parliament not only for the exhibition days but for an additional event there the week before: on 21 September (International Peace Day!) Mary Troup will take a group of primary school children to Holyrood to perform a storytelling/music piece on a peace theme. Other PEWG current work is in responding to the Scottish Government’s consultation on its Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan, as this is closely relevant Climate Justice and Economic Justice, two of the group’s three priority areas. The advocacy work continues despite the departure in February of our excellent Parliamentary Engagement Officer, Andrew Tomlinson, to take up a new role at Christian Aid Scotland. By our next GMS we hope to have a new PEO in post.

We were pleased to find from our 2022 Tabular Statement that Quaker numbers in Scotland remain quite stable, with attender numbers on the rise, though of course there are also sad losses of older members. We do however face real problems in filling roles - Trustees for example (we need at least one more GM Trustee). We are so grateful to the Trustees for their work, and especially to the group who have worked for over a year to complete the painstaking but hugely important task of producing for us a shortened and clarified set of Safeguarding guidance in line with BYM guidance but tailored for use in Scotland.



We are looking forward to hearing more from the Options for Scotland group at our next GM as to how we can reshape our structures and thus liberate our energies. Zoe Prosser led us in a reflection session: we are living with losses, fears and challenges, as well as the pressures of ‘should I/we...?’... ‘Who will do the job?’ But through our worship sharing there was a sense of uplift: so much hope and determination was expressed - Scottish Quakers are still energised and have a strong bond of community even if geographically our community is formed of many small, scattered groups. 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. We continue also to work with others on shared concerns: we heard reports, for example, from Friends working with Ecumenical and Interfaith colleagues, and with Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees.

Our gathering, sharing and reflection reminded us again of how much we want to do, how much we have to be grateful for, and what inspires us to continue.



Photograph 3: Looking at Mainland from Lismore.

### 1.3 Report of the General Meeting for Scotland in June Laura McMurtrie, West Scotland AM

Blended Meetings continue to offer opportunities for engagement and involvement of a greater number of Friends, than would otherwise be the case, if the Meeting was in person only. Online and in person engagement was equally comfortable and effective for Friends attending this Meeting. We appreciated Opening Worship and ministry regarding nurturing the soil in which unity can be found (part of section 3.06 Quaker faith and practice) particularly resonating with the challenges of today's world.

During the day, we learned about a wide range of issues which Quakers in



Photograph 4: Glen Ogle viaduct near Killin.

Scotland are responding to, many in conjunction with other organisations and faiths. These included climate change, climate justice, policies and responses to those who are refugees and those seeking asylum, the new (illegal) Migration Bill, our commitments to all our children, particularly supporting their learning about peace, and our engagement with the Scottish Parliament. We



received reports on these matters and were informed of open letters our Clerk has signed in conjunction with other faith communities and/or interest groups on many of these issues.

We received a verbal and written report from Martina Weitsch from York Area Meeting outlining the range of concerns that had led to the establishment of The Quaker Truth and Integrity Group as a Quaker recognised body in March 2022. There has been a steady erosion of truth and integrity in public life for decades now, and a growing public sense that this has become so widespread and blatant, that it is becoming normalised. The aim of the group is to move beyond dismay and concern to the more positive ground of reinforcing positive role models who exemplify the high standards of truth and integrity that we would all recognise. A Truth Award has been developed which will formally recognise people in public life who have displayed those high standards. The group is supported in other work, by staff time from BYM, and Woodbrook is also involved. Martina invited Quakers in Scotland to consider how they might become involved.

Friends will be completely aware of the work of the Options for Scotland Group, the reasons for it, and the fact that we have not yet reached unity in terms of the way forward at Area Meeting level. This was reflected in the feeling of G.M. Whilst we did not achieve unity, it was apparent that all Friends were seeking the best way forward for Quakers in Scotland for the future of our spiritual life and witness. The Group will continue until September and report to September G.M.

Much in evidence was the spiritual nature of our business methods and decision-making processes in everything we are doing. Discernment, caring for one another and the achievement of unity was at the heart of how we proceeded on Options for Scotland and indeed throughout the day. Next steps are outlined in the minutes.

This was a good day and a good GM. Our Clerks and Elders supported GM carefully and sensitively and there was a sense of Meeting upholding them.

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## 2 Ecumenical matters

### 2.1 Congregational Federation in Scotland

Kate Arnot, SE Scotland AM

**The 29<sup>th</sup> assembly was held on Saturday 3 June 2023 in Knightswood Congregational Church**

This was much smaller meeting than the last Congregational Federation gathering which I attended on behalf of General Meeting some years ago. The declining numbers were mentioned several times (very similar to ourselves where we too are concerned about fewer Friends in membership and, as with many organisations, secular and of faith, aging). There were two other ecumenical guests, from the United Reform Church and United Free Church, interesting all 3 of us from smaller denominations.

The agenda consisted of minutes and reports, including Trustees and financial and a guest speaker from Christian Aid. The Chair ensured a brisk pace throughout and we finished early to enjoy the glorious sunshine, always felt to be brief in Glasgow.

The event didn't begin for me on a joyous note as the first hymn was Psalm 23 but the new version, both re arranged words and music. I suppose I am a bit stuck in my past tradition as I only like Psalm 23 to the Biblical words and the tune "Crimond". There was much positive ministry. We need the Spirit of Christ and a year of prayer. We need to be faithful to Christ and his teachings, supporting one another. Pray for us. Our primary purpose is to go out and make disciples, as part of the church universal.

The Secretary's report was not so uplifting. One church had left the Federation and there was obviously much unsaid but sadness and acceptance. Many in roles are overstretched and tired. Moving onto the Trustees report, it became quite technical with a reminder of the role of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator and its requirements. A recommendation of £10 annually per member to be paid to the Federation was accepted.

The ecumenical report focussed on the massive restructuring of the Church of Scotland and the energy going into this with the consequent loss of energy elsewhere. We were asked to pray for the Church of Scotland as it moves through this difficult task. But, as with other churches, we are all in the same boat and need to work together. At local level there are good relationships. It is hoped that ecumenically there will be a bigger and wider body in Scotland, with improved communication and relationships, recognising the

value of working together. COVID has changed everything, we need to move forward and change with the times.

Nominations was positive with people coming forward to fill roles but a plea for more churches to respond and volunteer. We get out what we put in.

A shorter lunch break was followed by a fairly brief presentation by Christian Aid who have a presence in 29 countries and whose main aim is to eradicate poverty through justice and peace. Churches present reported, in the main, good news. Some mentioning new families from outwith Scotland who had joined and strengthened their congregation.

The final ministry was from Philippians 2 “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love being in full accord and one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interest of others.”

Encourage each other, share and commit.



Photograph 5: Around RSPB Insh Marshes near Kingussie.

## 2.2 General assembly of Church of Scotland Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM

I thoroughly enjoyed this year's Assembly, due in part to having friends around me - my fellow Ecumenical Officers, whom I'm getting to know through our monthly Zoom meetings and the events we all attend. I also really enjoyed random conversations with a variety of commissioners [representatives], sometimes asking for enlightenment, sometimes simply a friendly exchange - particularly in the lunch breaks, when I sat with other people who'd brought their own food.

Above all, though, this year's General Assembly was made memorable by the



Photograph 6: The iron bridge on Lairig Ghru pass, Rothiemurchus estate, near Coylumbridge.

presence of the Moderator, Sally Foster-Fulton. Born in South Carolina, she's been a minister in the Church of Scotland for a number of years - serving for a while in Falkirk before moving on to other charges. In recent years she's been head of Christian Aid in Scotland, and is taking a sabbatical while serving as Moderator. Together with the Principal Clerk, Fiona Smith, who was also in her first term in office, they made the conducting of the business a thing to enjoy and appreciate - serious when they needed to be, but with a light touch that brought humour in when appropriate. There was also a flavour of Quaker attitudes to business: we didn't actually get invited to be silent when

things were getting a bit hairy - instead we were invited to sing a chant we'd learned on our first day: *listen to the silence, listen to the noise; listen for the sound of the Spirit's voice*. A few repetitions of this, and we were gathered into a listening silence, ready to address the business once more.

I hadn't expected to attend on the Saturday, but did so instead of our GM Clerk, who was prevented. It meant being a part of the ceremonial - bowings and scrapings to the King's representative and listening to a letter from him, which was full of royal language but didn't say anything much. We even had an address at one point from Lord Lyon King of Arms who explained that all the brocade tabards, rods of office, etc, symbolised the joyful union and co-operation of church and state. I was not particularly convinced. I was delighted, however, to be among the ecumenical delegates when we were presented to the Moderator, shook hands, and personally welcomed and thanked for coming.

I was also very happy to be present for the two pieces of business I particularly wished to be present for – the consideration of ethical investments, and the report from the Ecumenical Relations Committee.

The question of ethical investment interested me because of previous years' attention to the ethics of investing, and the need to divest from fossil fuels. This latter has in the past been opposed by many who say 'stay invested and change from within' and/or 'our income will suffer if we disinvest'. I was particularly pleased to see that the report made particular mention of the Religious Society of Friends' total disinvestment from fossil fuels. It acknowledged that the whole subject of ethical investing is both very interesting and very complex. It also pointed out that there was no evidence that investing more ethically means losing money. In past years, disinvesting has been a contentious matter - this year I was pleasantly surprised to find the Assembly agreeing to the establishment of an Ethical Oversight committee, to offer guidance to the Church of Scotland Investors Trust.

The Ecumenical Relations Committee's [ERC] report contained much of which I was already aware, having been present / involved in a number of the events and bodies mentioned. What was particularly interesting was the commendation of the St Margaret Declaration Liturgy, used at the historic signing of the Declaration in Dunfermline Abbey last November, with encouragement to use it within parishes *as an expression of that which the Catholic Church in Scotland and the Church of Scotland hold in common*. The ERC was charged, in consultation with the Theological Forum, to *explore the ecumenical implications of a theology of friendship and report back to a future General Assembly*. It was also instructed *urgently to initiate a conversation*

*across the whole Church with our sister Churches in Scotland about cooperation in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland.* I hope that Quakers in Scotland can, at least, be part of the cooperation in service, if not in mission.

Sunday's service in St Giles was rendered memorable by the Moderator's sermon, which looked at the opening of Luke's letter to Theophilus, which we may know as The Acts of the Apostles. It was both deeply challenging and supremely encouraging, ending *So then, my dear Theophilus, make your move. Make your dramatic move. Make your braver move, and in the moving...go well...and go in passion...and go in power. Amen.*

(for the full text of the sermon go to [www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk) and follow the links About us / General Assembly / General Assembly 2023 / Reports and additional documents/ Rt Rev Sally Foster-Fulton's Sermon at St Giles' Cathedral. All the other reports are there, and many are worth a read.)

While waiting for the service to begin, I had a fascinating conversation with my Salvation Army counterpart, David Cavanagh, who [at my request] enlightened my ignorance about the Army's structure. We had an interesting exchange, coloured by my experience in the Roman Catholic church and their insistence on clergy celibacy, around the regulations surrounding the marriage of Officers [the equivalent of ministers]. They can only marry other Officers, which is possibly fine when there are plenty of to choose from, but less so with a shrinking pool of potential candidates. With the current shortage of Officers, it is less than ideal to have two Officers serving in one church when others are without an Officer - which, as with other denominations, is becoming the rule rather than the exception.

We had just got on to the 'marriage is between a man and a woman' - which he said is his firmly-held, Bible-based view - when the dignitaries began to arrive and we had to abandon our conversation. I did have time to say I disagreed but couldn't quote the necessary texts - and talked of our Testimony to Equality. I look forward to continuing this conversation, and the one about 'how do LGBTQI+ people fit into the Salvation Army', at a later date.

Monday's business opened with a communion celebration, before moving to the reports of the Assembly Trustees. *The landscape of the church is changing*, rather like the upheaval at the time of the Reformation in Scotland. It's a messy time, trying to reorganize, but there's *a monumental crisis in ministry and resources* and it's up to everyone to try to do it together - and not just in the Church of Scotland: a time to get new ideas and test them out. This means letting go of cherished stuff to allow new growth and developments,



being bold and taking risks. (*sounds familiar, Friends?*) There was a lot of discussion, and a large number of deliverances to agree, some of which was lost on me... The main point seemed to be the approval of the merger of the Faith Nurture Forum and the Faith Impact Forum, which would become the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team. (NB ‘Forum’ in this context means ‘executive body’ not ‘place where discussions take place’.) Some of the discussion was around who would get to be on this Team and thus have a say in the decisions about what gets done and where the money goes – should presbytery reps be chosen by the presbyteries themselves, or by the central nominations committee?

One of the most shocking matters being raised was the report that *Black ministers, ministers of colour and ministers from an ethnic minority are being overlooked or asked not to officiate at funerals but to give way to a White Scottish minister.* Assembly Trustees were instructed to highlight this issue, urge the Faith Impact Forum to liaise with relevant public bodies and funeral directors to invite their intervention, and encourage Presbytery Clerks to raise awareness of this in every parish.

Monday ended with the Moderator’s reception which was followed by a din-



Photograph 7: A view of the river Ouse from Lendal bridge, York.

ner for the Ecumenical and Overseas Guests, at which I had the delight of sitting next to the Moderator. I had innumerable interesting conversations

during the evening, and found myself explaining Quakers to various people - “do you really spend the whole time in silence? No readings, no sermon?” - well yes, sometimes...It was great that I didn’t have to worry about using god language or treading on non-theist toes, but could exchange experiences with many lovely people.

After that, I was really glad to hand over to Susan Mitchell, our GM Assistant Clerk, and have the Tuesday off - three consecutive days ‘on’ and one lateish night meant that I was ready for a break!

### **Susan Mitchell reports on the business of Tuesday 23 May 2023**

This was my first time attending the General Assembly. Although my early experience of religion was in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and learning to recite the Shorter Catechism, I was not fully prepared for the pomp and ceremony that started the day. The deference shown to the Moderator as she came in and to the Lord High Commissioner sitting above her in a sort of throne with the coat of arms above him – it all felt a bit alien. Before the business began there was some hymn singing and then some worship on the theme of CHANGE – both within the Church and on account of the Climate catastrophe. There were some stirring words from the Moderator, with *Tick tock, the time is now* as a refrain.

I felt more comfortable once the business began! Much of this concerned the Faith Nurture Forum report. The convener, Rev Rosie Frew, acknowledged that the Presbytery Mission Planning has been “incredibly stressful” for ministers and the Kirk as it seeks to reshape the Church for mission and service around fewer buildings and fewer charges due to diminishing finances and members.

In response to a question she revealed that 4% of 596 ministers were currently on sick leave and 14% of them had cited work-related stress. Often breakdown in relationships are involved – people need to be kinder to each other. She spoke of the various ways that pastoral care was available for ministers which was acknowledged as valuable. Ministerial morale is low. There was a request by Rev Sandy Horsburgh for a survey- of the causes of stress citing Desmond Tutu “There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.” Support for this came from Church of England delegate Rev Tim Norwood who said their (C of E) exercise identified 6 risk factors for occupational burnout. He reminded us that caring for ministers was important. The need for such



Photograph 8: A view from the Titanic Quarter, Belfast.

a survey was accepted following an electronic vote. I was very heartened by this and spoke to Sandy Horsburgh afterwards.

A Lifelong learning programme is being introduced which sounds a bit like what Woodbrooke does. It will cover topics like equipping for ministry and peace work. Another new initiative is the setting up of Apprenticeships for ministry but the details are still being worked on.

In 2019, the Forum was tasked with the development of 100 new worshipping communities. Congregations now report 400 new worshipping communities in some stage of development, including Messy Church, Café Church and on-line worship. The Pioneer Scotland network has grown to 300 members and last year the online ministry Sanctuary First was brought within the national Church.

The other reports that day were on Social care, the Legal Questions committee and the Guild. There was a report from [CrossReach](#) the Church of Scotland social care organisation. The direct provision that it offers includes care homes and a school. The convenor made an appeal for the Scottish Faiths Leaders to sign a declaration on fair pay for care workers.

The Legal Questions committee convenor quoted the former Archbishop of

Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams who said of Church law ‘it begins from that basic affirmation of equity which is the fact of membership in the Body of Christ.’ Questions were asked about difficulties arising for ministers in relation to same sex marriage where ministers worked as a team as opposed to one per parish. There were reports from the Guild on their theme ‘wee seeds big trees’; the merging of congregations has in some instances led to an increase in Guild members and in January a Young Adult Guild for 18-30 year olds was launched. The Guild has been called ‘Sunday school for grannies’.

I found it an interesting day where the focus was on the very real issues facing the church in terms of dwindling congregations and stressed ministers. I was pleased that the Assembly seemed to be moving towards greater equality of representation in listening to questions that were raised about having representation of a youth voice and that of probationer ministers. I was made to feel welcome and was free to explore the bookstall over lunch. I learned too late that there was a fringe meeting at lunchtime by Christian Aid that, had I known, I would have gone to. For me there were a couple of highlights: a very moving contribution from a deaf minister about the needs of the deaf/blind and how she had conducted a wedding with a large number of guide dogs present, and then when the Moderator paid tribute “from the heart” to the longest serving female minister, Rev Jean Montgomerie, stating “we stand on the shoulders of giants”. Jean Montgomerie was the first ordained woman in the Church of Scotland and has served for 50 years.

### **Back to me...**

Wednesday’s business began with the reading of the Reply To His Majesty’s Most Gracious Letter, which again used a lot of royal language to say not very much.

Next time I’ll know my way around better and I’ll look out for the lunchtime fringe meetings!

We then came to one of the topics that most exercises me at the Assembly – the committee on chaplains to his majesty’s forces. As I’ve said previously, I completely agree that members of the armed services need chaplains: what I don’t agree with is having armed forces in the first place. It was interesting to hear from a chaplain to cadet forces talking of a discussion around ‘*Thou shalt not kill*’ and ‘*we train for defence by potentially killing*’ – I should have like to hear what conclusions they came to. There was also a plea for better care of broken and demobbed people, and a wider promulgation of the SSAFA, the armed forces charity, *so that people are aware that help is there, and that it’s not a sign of weakness to ask for help.*

I also find it hard to listen to whichever armed forces High Heid Yin is invited to address the Assembly – this year it was The Senior Royal Navy Officer and First Sea Lord, who spoke of how much ‘padres’ are needed. What bothers me is that it seems at times that the chaplains are seen as the glue which keeps the forces together and enables the men to fight – as though God is seen as a tool for making the armed forces work... and the Assembly seems to endorse that view. I spoke of my reservations afterwards, and was assured that there were those present who would agree with me. I was also heartened by the Moderator’s comment – *every time we take up arms we collectively fail each other (and those in command do not disagree)*.

We moved on to topics with which I was in total accord. I commend to you the whole of the Faith Impact Forum report, and its supplementary report on the Jewish-Christian Glossary project. The latter has resulted in the publication of a glossary which, it is hoped, will improve mutual understanding and encourage conversations. The Chief Rabbi, Sir Ephraim Yitzchak Mirvis, was invited to address us, and spoke of how *‘how you listen is more important than how you speak or what you say’*. He hoped that the glossary, which he sees as a mine of information and a great resource, would encourage constructive engagement which also acknowledges and respects our differences. (*The*



Photograph 9: A sunny afternoon just outside Stirling.

*Glossary is also in the Additional Documents on the GA part of the Church*

of Scotland's website.)

The main Faith Impact Forum report begins with an impressively extensive examination of the Church's links to the transatlantic slave trade between the union of the crowns in 1707 and the emancipation of the British West Indies in 1838. It looks at individuals within the Church with links to slavery, monies given for church buildings and memorial windows, funds and financial legacies, the legacy of enslavement as evidenced in race relations today, and much more

There were many other important and interesting sections in the Faith Impact Forum report looking at environmental issues, international relations, peace and disarmament, violence against women, poverty and the cost of living, parliamentary and political affairs, gender recognition, conversion therapy, and drugs and substance abuse. Some young people present spoke out on this last issue, one saying *You want more young people, but you do not listen to what we say. Young representatives are not heard, or told 'you are wrong'. We are glad to be here, but felt unheard, or only superficially listened to.*

The Faith Impact Forum also recommended in their report that the Church should *support the current legal protections which prohibit assisted suicide/ assisted dying and urge members of the Church to make representation to their MSPs.* This did not meet with the general approval of the Assembly, and a lengthy and at times very emotional debate ensued. Those in favour of the motion spoke about the meaningfulness of life, the toll on those members of the medical profession who assist people to die, and how people with dementia are still people. Those against gave very moving testimonies to loved ones who suffered dreadfully – *'why won't they let me go?' 'I want to go/ I'm ready to go'*. They made it plain that their aim was to open up the conversation around assisted dying: it's not a mental health issue – suicide – it's a desire to die with dignity.

At this point the Moderator declared that the session break would be taken. On our return, we were encouraged to join in singing *listen to the silence, listen to the noise: listen for the sound of the Spirit's voice* and it was noticeable how the atmosphere within the Assembly calmed and the silence deepened prayerfully. The final deliverance that was agreed by electronic voting stated that

*Noting that the historical decisions of the General Assembly have been to support current civil law as to assisted dying, but now recognising that there exists a range of theological views and ethical opinions on assisted dying within the Church, instructs the Faith Impact Forum, the Theological Forum and other*



*relevant parties to explore such views and opinions and report to a future General Assembly.*

There was further business that day, but I had soon to leave to make my way, in the company of Ecumenical Officer friends, down to Holyrood palace for the Lord High Commissioner's reception, which followed Beating the Retreat in the courtyard in front of the palace. I was really pleased that I could manage to stand throughout this and enjoy conversations with the Methodist and Salvation Army Eos, before having yet more fascinating conversations during the reception. I was delighted to be approached by someone who recognised me from the recent Methodist Synod and came to say how much my contribution [reading the recommendations of the Options for Scotland group, which seemed particularly apposite to the Methodists' situation] had been appreciated.

I would have liked to attend on the Thursday, since Michael was prevented, but I had a Book of Discipline Revision Committee zoom to attend so, regretfully, said goodbye to 2023's General Assembly and started looking forward to next year's one.

I find all these ecumenical activities absolutely fascinating. If you share my fascination, please let GM noms know. The joy of building relationships across what might be seen as divisions or barriers is enormous, and the respect with which Qs are regarded is humbling.



Photograph 10: A view of Loch Alsh and Skye from Gavin Maxwell Museum.

## 2.3 United Free Church of Scotland Women's Home and Overseas Committee- Ladies Day Susan Mitchell West Scotland AM

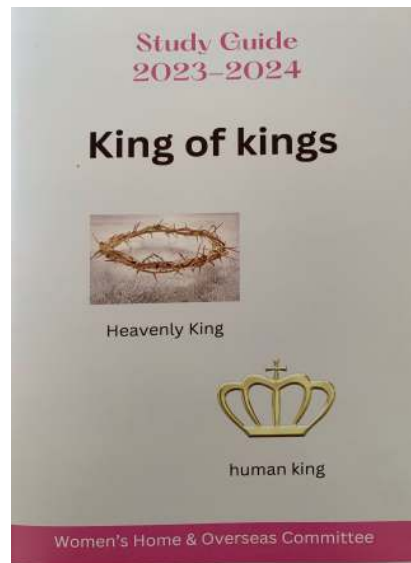
This was my first time of attending as the Quaker delegate (or in any other guise). I was warmly welcomed and ushered to the front row beside the two other ecumenical delegates, a local Methodist and the convenor of the Church of Scotland Guild.

During the welcome speech, the delegates were introduced, thanked for coming and given an envelope. Mine contained a daily prayer and study guide and 'Steadfast' the magazine of the United Free Church of Scotland as well as a card which thanked me for being there representing the 'ladies of the Quaker Church.' If you have read previous reports for our delegates (I hadn't) you will perhaps know that the programme for the day is made up of speakers from the Church and invited speakers, prayers, hymns, songs and tributes. The singer was Ruth Box of Pioneer UK Ministries who sang four solos throughout the day.

The theme this year was King of Kings. King of Kings and Lord of Lords – Revelation 19, verse 16.

There was reference to the heavenly king and the new human king Charles III. Virtually all of the many hymns had a royal theme. The invited speakers were from the Scottish Bible Society (SBS), Elaine Duncan and Adrian Armstrong. We also heard from the Moderator, Rev Archie Ford and members of the Women's Home and Overseas Committee. The United Free Church is an evangelical church and in the past ran a hospital in Botswana. Although the hospital was taken over by the state in 1975 there are still connections with the church in Botswana.

In the morning Elaine Duncan spoke of the work of the SBS focussing on the parable of the Sower. The sower features on the logo of the Bible Society in



many parts of the world. She was an engaging speaker and got us thinking that really we should view this story as the parable of the soil – there is nothing wrong with the seed. That said, she went of to describe how the SBS has published a new edition of the New Testament, changing the order and written as a book without verses or chapter headings to read – ‘just like an ordinary book’. There was such a crowd at the bookstall that I never got to look at a copy. Other SBS publications include Bible stories and books of the New Testament aimed at young people using graphic and magazine formats.

Lunch was provided at the hotel and afterwards I went to look at the River Tay whilst the others gathered in hymn singing.

In the afternoon we heard from Adrian Armstrong in what was described as ‘more of a devotional word to be applied to our own hearts and lives’. His style was very intense and evangelical – he was certain of his beliefs. He mentioned that his father was a used car salesman and that Adrian had picked up some of his father’s style. I’d been reading Richard Holloway’s ‘Stories we tell ourselves’ where he says “I want to resist those who claim to have it all figured out exactly and perfectly, and are out to compel the rest of us to see it the way they do. This passion to persuade is normally associated with the sales departments of religious and political systems.” This captures what I felt. In Adrian’s presentation there was much about the coronation of Charles III and how often the Bible had featured in the ceremony. There was also a pencil and paper exercise for us to complete.

It was a strange way for a Quaker and a republican to spend a spectacularly sunny spring day. Not much space for quiet reflection or ‘what canst thou say’ but the women I met were friendly and sincere.



Photograph 11: Supplied by Susan Mitchell.

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### 3 Book of Discipline Revision Committee Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM

#### Report from July 2023 committee meeting

Your committee met at Woodbrooke for the last time over the weekend of 14-16 July 2023. We were delighted to be together again, and achieved an impressive amount of work – all tinged with the sadness of having to say goodbye to a beloved place which has played such an important part in our work so far. A particularly moving part of our weekend was the opportunity on Saturday night to share our memories of Woodbrooke: a very deep and rich session appreciated by all those who took part.

One of our number was prevented by ill health from joining us, and another joined us on line. Paul Parker, our Recording Clerk, was with us for the whole weekend, meaning he got a very good idea of how we are progressing and was able to offer advice and information where appropriate. It was particularly good to be reassured that we are making good progress: it's very easy to lose sight of the overall picture when you're deeply embroiled in a particular topic's complexities.

Our agenda included plenty of time for us to share how we are, or are not, coping with our current workload. It was re-emphasised that it's okay to say no to taking on more work! We revisited our decision last year to appoint named pastoral friends – it was felt that they were useful and that a more formal appointment should be made. Our nominating group were asked to find three names, one each to be appointed for one, two, and three years, in addition to discerning names for other committee appointments.

We spent a lot of time sharing our experiences of, and learnings from, the feedback we have received on our draft Nominations and Marriage texts. Those Friends who were appointed to deal with the feedback received around 168xA4 pages of response, some from individuals, some a collection of responses from e.g. local or area meetings. Others reported on Friends' contributions during 'visits' by members of the committee, or in conversation. While we are keen to ensure that Friends are aware of our work, we also need to be very specific about what sort of feedback we are asking for, and what we hope to learn from it.

Much of the feedback was positive, confirming that the work needs to be done and we are working along the right lines: of course, there was some criticism, too, sometimes rather forcefully expressed. Some Friends voiced a concern that the words of the Marriage Declaration currently make no provision for

people who would prefer not to use ‘god language’. This matter is not within our remit, and we agreed to pass this matter to Meeting for Sufferings for their consideration.

Friends’ feedback will be taken on board as we continue our work, as is that from individual committee members assigned as ‘readers’ for topic papers which have reached the point where an ‘outside eye’ can give valuable assistance. We considered a large number of papers over this weekend. Some are works in progress, some possibly nearing completion and ready to be ‘banked’ for now. Three which had been written in the committee’s early days, had needed the attention of a reader because the groups that had worked on them had been laid down.

On a personal note, I and the other members of the writing group were greatly heartened at the very positive response to our paper on Worship. We had got our noses so close to the paper, and we had done so much intensive work immediately before the committee weekend, that we couldn’t see the overall shape of the piece. It was a relief to hear real appreciation of our text and the fact that it includes a large amount of narrative/ explanatory text surrounding the extracts we had chosen. It was also greatly heartening to be told that the piece only needed small ‘tweaks’ and could be banked once these were done – we had been expecting to carry on working on it until our next committee meeting in October.

Other papers were also deemed ready or virtually ready to be banked: others, begun more recently, were proffered by their writing groups to check that they were on the right lines, and/ or whether anything crucial was missing. Three new topics had writers and readers assigned to them: Faithful Lives, Personal Journeys, and Funerals. I was delighted to join the last-named group, and have the opportunity to work on a fairly self-contained and uncontroversial topic with two committee members with whom I’ve not previously worked. We’ve already set up our first meeting to discuss our task, and I’m intrigued to have been told by one of them that ‘they work in a very unusual and unorthodox way’ – I can’t wait to find out what that is!

New groups were also set up to work on our very early text on Spiritual and Pastoral Care; to develop our work on Diversity and Inclusion into a separate piece of text. Another group will think about how we include ‘anthology material’ [extracts from others’ writings] that is not contained in the main narrative text of our book [especially the church government sections] but which needs to be present to indicate the deep richness of our written heritage and more recent writing of which many Friends may be unaware. We have also set up a group to start looking at how we might approach creat-

ing the overall structure of our book, to help us when we reach the stage of ‘opening the box’ of banked texts and seeing how they might fit together.

Your committee also looked at the timeline we agreed last year. We were greatly heartened to see that we are further ahead with some of our work than the plan had suggested. However, our work is also pointing out things we didn’t include in the plan, like further developing early texts and adding new topics to our list as they become apparent. The group working on diversity and inclusion within the whole book have realised that there needs to be a discrete text on this subject. We will also need to work more on Advices & Queries once our draft text nears completion.



Photograph 12: Rothiemurchus estate, near Coylumbridge.

Paul Parker’s emphasising “*proximity to points of no return*” was extremely helpful. Our timeline has important points which impinge on the work of other parts of Yearly Meeting – dates by which certain parts of our work have to be completed if they are to be able to be presented to Yearly Meeting as a whole. We have to take into account when and how we are going to need help from Friends House staff and how this will fit into the timetable of all the other work they do. We also need to work closely with Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee – not least in agreeing ‘who does what’ when we prepare to share our final draft with the Yearly Meeting. Paul was able to assure us that, because our work requires this, we would be given permission to have two in person committee meetings next year, and should also ask to do this in subsequent years.

It was becoming very clear that the work doesn’t stop once the initial draft-writing nears completion – in fact, it might only be beginning! There are



so many other things to consider: one committee member commented that we have had a very relaxed few years and that the next few may well get more intense. It was thought that the committee might take a temporary break from formal ‘visits’ to LMs, AMs and other interested groups, though we would continue to run sessions at Yearly Meeting, and individual members could continue with ad hoc sessions where they felt able.

We need to continue taking care of ourselves and each other, and of the committee as a whole. Individuals might have to consider asking for temporary release from other service, or delay taking on anything new. I was feeling slightly apprehensive about this potentially increased work load, and was greatly heartened when our co-clerk, Rosie Carnall, said “*I back us to do this... we’ve got this, Friends, we just need to stay the course*”.

Many of us had arrived at Woodbrooke feeling somewhat overburdened and even disheartened about our work. Being together again has re-energised us and given us the strength and inspiration to continue our task. We look forward to meeting again in October at the University of Warwick.

Once again, Friends, please continue to uphold us – we cannot do this work alone: we rely on you to help and support us.

**Our key messages:**

1. We have spent time reviewing the responses from Friends to the draft texts of 2 topics for the new book (Marriage, and Nominations) that we had shared. We are grateful for what we have learned from this feedback which will now inform our work going forward.
2. We have sent a minute to Meeting for Sufferings regarding changes to the marriage declaration suggested in this feedback that are beyond the remit of our Committee.
3. Consideration continues regarding how we make our book accessible and inclusive: planning for multiple accessible formats; making it clear when quotations are introduced; including useful cross-referencing; and ensuring that a sufficient inclusivity and diversity of Quaker voices across Britain are included in the final version.
4. We have reviewed our progress in relation to our overall project plan that aims to offer a complete first full draft of the new book to Yearly Meeting 2027, and are pleased that we remain on track.

## 4 Adieu Sue!

**Habeō grātiam.**

All the very best Sue, as you move on to pastures new. It has been fantastic to work with you and thank you very much for helping with the *Scottish Friend* along with other GM matters. I am sure your new adventure will an exciting one. We would certainly miss you.



Photograph 13: Lismore Parish Church (Formerly St Moulag’s Cathedral, Isle of Lismore).



*The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily the opinions of the Society of Friends in Scotland, Britain or elsewhere.*