

Aug 24

## Scottish Friend



Photograph 1: Display at Women in Revolt! Modern Two, Edinburgh.

Scottish Friend is distributed by Jane Booth, on behalf of the General Meeting for Scotland.



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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>GM affairs</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Calling for General Meeting for Scotland Michael Hutchinson, GM Clerk . . . . .	3
1.2	Report of the GM for Scotland in June Kate Arnot, SE Scotland AM with Alison Burnley, East Scotland AM . . . . .	5
<b>2</b>	<b>Ecumenical Matters</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1	Scottish Episcopal Church Synod Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM . . . . .	7
2.2	Report from General Assembly of the Church of Scotland Mary Woodward (SE), Katrina McCrea (West) and Susan Mitchell (Asst Clerk, GM) . . . . .	12
2.3	Visit to Finnish and Estonian Friends May 2024 Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM . . . . .	20
2.4	Visit to Central European Yearly Meeting May 2024 Buša Cochrane-Muir, East Scotland AM . . . . .	24
2.5	Congregational Federation in Scotland Kate Arnot, SE Scotland AM . . . . .	25
<b>3</b>	<b>Book of Discipline Revision Committee</b> Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM . . . . .	<b>26</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Parliamentary Engagement Working Group</b>	<b>28</b>
4.1	A Newbie's Reflections on the work of the PEWG Carol Jennings, SE Scotland AM . . . . .	28
<b>5</b>	<b>Climate Matters</b>	<b>31</b>
5.1	Greenwash won't wash with the testimonies Carolyn Burch, North Scotland AM . . . . .	31
<b>6</b>	<b>Community Matters</b>	<b>33</b>
6.1	Memories of a chocolate millionaire's mansion David O'Donoghue, Monkstown Meeting . . . . .	33
6.2	Working Together with Faiths Sila Collins-Walden, North Scotland AM . . . . .	35
6.3	An interest group or a concern Margaret Roy, West Scotland AM . . . . .	38

# 1 GM affairs

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

**Saturday, 21<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all!

**Our next General Meeting will be on the 21<sup>th</sup> September, in the Studio at the Spectrum Centre, 1 Margaret Street, Inverness, IV1 1LS and by Zoom.** Note that the date was originally going to be 14<sup>th</sup> September, but had to be changed. The Spectrum Centre is next to the bus station and a multi-story car park, and a short walk from Inverness railway station. We thank North Scotland AM Friends for organising the venue and arrangements.



More practical details, the agenda and papers will go out to all on the GM emailing list in the second week of September. A second mailing a few days before GM will include draft minutes and any additional papers. The day will begin with refreshments from 10:30 am, with the business meeting starting with open worship at 11 am. After a break for lunch between 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm, we have our afternoon session which will finish by about 4.00 pm, so that Friends can make their way homeward. Refreshments won't be served at that time.

As part of the booking of the Spectrum Centre, food and drink is included, including for lunch, so use the registration link to specify any dietary requirements.

PLEASE USE this registration link for November GM, however you attend:  
<https://shorturl.at/1pzhx>.

*Please note that you will receive Zoom log in details even if you have registered to attend face to face– this is a default setting of the registration set up. Registering for the meeting assists in planning for the number of people expecting to come. . We need to know numbers of this attending at the meeting house as there are physical limits to numbers. If you don't receive a receipt email within a short period, please contact our zoom host, Amer Syed using [amer.s.syed@gmail.com](mailto:amer.s.syed@gmail.com), or the clerk.*

Please do join us! All are welcome. This is an opportunity to meet together with Friends from across Scotland. In a spirit of worship we attend to our church affairs, and matters concerning the spiritual life and witness of Quakers in Scotland.

At this General Meeting, our business will include looking at aspects of the wide variety of our General Meeting responsibilities and activities, and will include several updates or reports. In the morning, we will aim to spend most time considering the report, already sent to Area Meetings and Friends on the GM emailing list (on 7<sup>th</sup> August), from the Quakers in Scotland Co-ordinating Group and its Community Subgroup. We were asked for more information on how Friends in Scotland could work as communities if a single Quaker body is set up. Here we have opportunity to consider which model we think would suit us. The paper has been sent out early so Friends and Meetings have opportunity to think about it and ask the members of the Community Subgroup in their Area any questions.

In the afternoon we have our nominations committee report and other regular reports, including those focused on parliamentary and climate action. We will hear from some of the young Friends who attended Shindig (the summer residential for 11–16 year olds). We are asked to confirm we are members of the Scottish Christian Forum, the ecumenical channel for Scotland. We will hear from Zoe Prosser, our Local Development Worker, on how we consider her priorities for 2025. We also have the report on the evaluation of our Scottish Quaker Community Justice Working Group, so we may make a decision on its future.

If you do not receive GM emails with the papers, please ask our Administrator, Jane Booth, for copies or to be on the mailing list ([scotfriends@gmail.com](mailto:scotfriends@gmail.com)). If you have any questions, please contact the clerk, by mail [scotfriendsclerk@gmail.com](mailto:scotfriendsclerk@gmail.com) or telephone 0141 770 7865.

The following General Meeting will be blended again on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November in East Scotland AM, venue to be arranged, and online.

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

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## **1.2 Report of the GM for Scotland in June**

### **Kate Arnot, SE Scotland AM with Alison Burnley, East Scotland AM**

General Meeting for Scotland was held on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2024 in Glasgow Meeting House, not the most green of views. There were 19 Friends present in Glasgow and 34 Friends present on zoom. I find that more than one screen of zoom (25) is difficult to follow and also to feel part of a community of worshipping Friends as I can't see all who are present.

Good news is that membership increased by 5 (2 by convincement and 3 transfers in) but sadly there were also 3 deaths recorded.

More good news was the report on the Families Weekend held 3rd – 5th May 2024 in Pitlochry. 15 parents and grandparents and fourteen young people aged 4 – 15 years attended, The theme for the weekend was hearing, respecting and honouring children and young people's voices regarding rights, democracy and political engagement.

We received the Trustees annual report for 2023, including the accounts which had a small, planned, deficit. We heard from our Parliamentary Engagement Group of their work with the Scottish Parliament including setting up a small group to engage with Land Reform. In general, the Scottish Parliament is more open to engaging with Quaker concerns than Westminster although, hopefully, this may change. We agreed a process for signing, often with other organisations, letters and/or petitions.

Finally, there was a substantive discussion on Nominations, aims and processes. This was very ably introduced by the local development worker for Scotland, Zoe Prosser who outlined 5 principles enabling a good nomination process. The minute included:-

Discernment within a nominations system must be based on strong communities of faith. When we have difficulties in operating the process, in finding Friends to serve, in accepting service, in fulfilling our service, they may be telling us that there are fundamental issues within our Quaker communities that need addressing. The principles operate from our meetings being communities where we know and support each other. Nominations process is the more difficult if we do not know each other, do not support Friends in the roles in which they serve and don't seek a common responsibility to make things work.

There are practical issues too. Are our meetings for business clear about what they are asking for in seeking Friends to serve? Is the term of service and role description clear? Is there ongoing role support, training or 'apprenticeship' available? Are we communicating with our meetings on the opportunities for service through a schedule of roles?

We are aware of the pressures on all of us that make acceptance of roles difficult and the dwindling number of Friends available. The nominations process can become a burden to those involved, and this too is a warning sign that we need to heed. We can get things wrong. A measure for a successful nominations process is when it becomes a joy, in matching Friends to roles that can develop and show Friends their potential, in building the collective experience and development of all. Service is part of our spiritual journey.



Photograph 2: Lighthouse at Rhue.

## 2 Ecumenical Matters

### 2.1 Scottish Episcopal Church Synod Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM

**St Paul's and St George's Church, Edinburgh 3-15 June 20254**

It was with great joy that I arrived at “Ps & Gs” for the Scottish Episcopal Church [SEC]’s synod, a joy enhanced by the knowledge that my buddy this year was Liz Baker, minister at Holy Trinity Church, Pitlochry, who was assigned as my buddy a few years ago. She is ‘the other Quaker at Synod’ – her husband is a Quaker and, when she can, she attends Meeting. There were many other familiar faces: both my ecumenical counterparts and members of the SEC, a very friendly bunch of people who welcomed me back with open arms [in some cases quite literally – hugs abounded every day.]

Synod began with a Eucharist. The readings spoke of wisdom – *by wisdom a house is built; wise warriors are mightier than strong ones* – and the different gifts given by Spirit to the members of the one body. *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.* The Primus spoke of this Synod’s ‘outward-looking agenda’, asking us *do people join us because of our silence, or because of our actions and words? Talk of peace, don’t just ignore the conflict. Pray for everyone involved in the General Election, and for honest and generous debate.*

Business began with the welcome to delegates and guests, all of whom are invited up to be greeted by the Primus, Bishop Mark – and here was my first hug-with-a-bishop, of which I had many throughout the three days of Synod. One of the reasons I love this Synod so much is that all the bishops are known by their first names – so very different from the formal, at-arms’-length interactions with bishops whom one would not dream of hugging, in my Catholic youth!

Administrative stuff without which the Synod couldn’t happen followed. Mention was made of the security arrangements – in advance of the introduction later this year or early next of new legislation colloquially known as “Martyn’s Law” but officially titled the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill which will apply to events of a certain size, including those at places of worship. Lunch was delightful – the ecumenical guests and their buddies congregated for a very chatty session: here I met bishop-elect David and had a fascinating conversation with him and others.

The afternoon contained more admin – accepting the annual report and accounts and looking at various matters contained therein. An interesting and lively debate surrounded “seeking Synod’s mind on voting”, which in pre-lockdown was always by a show of hands. It was proposed that at this Synod, where all those taking part were present in Ps & Gs, voting should be done



electronically. This is very speedy, and efficient, you would think – but there were concerns about the accuracy of the vote and the accessibility of the small hand-held devices. There were differing views, too, about the transparency of voting – for some, a show of hands was a positive way of indicating how one felt about a matter: for others, the possibility of being intimidated by those around one seemed very real. There was also a question about the carbon footprint of electronic voting – waving a voting card is much greener.

An update on the SEC's progress towards Net Zero pointed me towards a portal on the SEC website – [netzerochurch.scot](http://netzerochurch.scot) – which has positive stories on many topics, including the Serenity Garden at my buddy Liz's Pitlochry church: do check it out! After tea the provincial youth group told us of the many things they get up to, including a 'provincial sleepover' which sounded enormous fun. In past years their contribution has been on the Saturday morning of Synod: it was good that they were 'promoted' to being part of the first day's business, so that Synod could hear their thoughts and opinions on upcoming Synod business. A contribution from the 12-14-year old group asked why money was spent investing in and maintaining illegal and unethical nuclear weapons when the money could be so much better spent elsewhere. Someone spoke passionately about the need for first aid training for congregations; another spoke of the many times she was approached by fellow-pupils wanting to talk about her faith and practice; a third was encouraged by the ambitious Net Zero programme, and wanted the church's young people to be involved. *I am scared. Think of the world you want your children, grandchildren and great-grand-children to inherit.*

Bishop Andrew talked about the statistics the SEC gathers [e.g. the number of attendees/ communicants on a particular Sunday] and what use is made of them. At our tables, we were invited to consider what other statistics could usefully be gathered and feed this back via our facilitators. Evening prayer closed the day's session, and included the opportunity to belt out a wonderful setting of the Magnificat - *Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord.*

The Synod Dinner at the Royal Scots Club was excellent, as ever. Once again I was seated beside a bishop: this time bishop Dorsey, an American Episcopalian who was looking after a diocese while the incumbent is the subject of a disciplinary investigation. Dorsey is a native of New Hampshire, whose state motto I saw on so many car licence plates while travelling around the States is *Live free or die*. This has many possible interpretations, and we had a very lively conversation. The after-dinner speeches displayed the warm family nature of the SEC – a fond farewell to bishop Kevin who is retiring this year, and then an appreciation of the incredible John Stuart. He has served as Secretary General for very many years, quietly and gently making sure everything runs smoothly at Synod and throughout the year going way beyond the call of duty in helping anyone and everyone in need. He will be greatly missed by everyone, including me.

Friday's opening prayers began with some silence. The Mission Board gave brief presentations on SEC global partnerships and local mission, the latter prompting table discussion about *what would be absent from your local area if your worshipping community was not there?* and *what two things could your church do in and with the local community, and what resources would you need to make them happen?* – questions we could profitably ask ourselves...

Motion 14 followed – *that this Synod agree the position that the use of nu-*



Photograph 3: Burn at Corrieshallach Gorge National Nature Reserve.

*clear weapons can never be theologically justified, and the church commits to*

*a policy of advocating for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.* To date the SEC had not agreed a position on this subject: strong views were expressed both for and against this motion. I felt it very telling that Britain's Trident-carrying submarines have names like *HMS Vengeance* and *HMS Revenge*... The majority of Synod voted in favour of the motion: someone pointed out that *if peace is our profession, we don't just walk away, saying "we've done it" – we need to act upon this.*

Mention was made of the Holyrood consultation on Assisted Dying, for which views need to be submitted by August 16th. Discussion at grassroots level is important. It's on the agenda of the Church in Society committee. Another concern is to establish a legal right to high quality palliative care.

We then moved on to Canons – the rules of the SEC - for the alteration of which there is a lengthy and complex procedure. Canons 15 and 16 need updating to reflect current practice around ministers of other denominations celebrating the eucharist in SEC churches: alteration of these canons has safeguarding implications which also need addressed. The various motions were passed and it was reiterated that *discussions will continue – this agreement is the starting point.*

Synod was happy to *note and acknowledge the emerging form of the Scottish Christian Forum [SCF]... and affirm the continued participation of representatives of the SEC within the SCF.* The SCF was recognised as the National Ecumenical Body within Scotland [rather than ACTS - Action of Churches Together in Scotland]; the trustees of ACTS were thanked and encouraged in developing the future role of ACTS. The SEC thus joins with the Scottish Methodists and the Church of Scotland in recognising the SCF, and the United Reformed Church will address this matter at their September Synod.

Friday afternoon's business was rather dry – more administrative stuff and more Canons, one about *the structure, furniture and monuments of churches and the due care thereof* and others pertaining to changes in liturgies. This prompted a lengthy and very lively discussion. The day ended with a report from the Primus about his recent visit to Jamaica with the then Moderator of the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church Moderator, all of whom found the experience deeply challenging in many ways. 'Our' version of reparations is not necessarily right or the only one. We need to listen, and build relationships, and learn what is wanted and what we can offer, rather than simply offering an apology and money. Bishop Mark wants to set up small groups to begin to look at ways of continuing this engagement, *getting together people who know far more about this than I do.*

Saturday began with more Canons – this time to do with safeguarding. They were quickly dealt with and we turned our attention to a motion concerning the current situation in Israel-Palestine brought to Synod via Rule 10 – the SEC equivalent of a private member's bill. The motion sought to welcome and

affirm the SEC bishops' recent call for a ceasefire and a just peace; to call the bishops to continue to speak out boldly on behalf of the church in matters of justice and human rights; to express solidarity with the diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East and other Christian communities in Palestine-Israel; and called upon the Ethical Investment Advisory Group to *formulate guidelines to assist all bodies in this Church to ensure that they in no way benefit from the exploitation, oppression, and dispossession of the Palestinian people.*

Once again, feelings were strongly expressed. There was much support for the first three parts of the motion, but grave concern about the fourth: many people said they couldn't support that – it was too partisan – and would therefore have to vote against the whole motion. Various amendments and amendments to amendments were proposed. The Primus suggested that Synod might approve a short pause in proceedings so that an addition to the third section could be composed. This was agreed, and the third motion now also expressed the church's *profound grief and horror at all the violence and suffering experienced by people in Israel-Palestine over many years.* Synod approved this addition; the fourth part of the motion was removed, and the amended tripartite motion carried with a large majority.

There was a much-needed coffee break. Before the final business – approving appointments to various Committees, Councils and Boards – I was invited to address Synod. I thanked everyone for having me, said how much I love attending Synod, and gave loving greetings from Quakers in Scotland. I then offered my now traditional few moments of silence. This year *Advices & Queries 8* seemed most appropriate to invite participation in the silence.

*Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone, but when we join with others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of God's love drawing us together and leading us.*

After the conclusion and final blessing, four people came to thank me for the silence and ask if they could have a copy of A&Q which I had said I'd brought with me. I only had three, so I directed the fourth person to the BYM website. Other people thanked me for my contribution, and hoped I would be back next year.

I am very grateful for the gift of attendance at all the ecumenical events I go to on your behalf, and the relationships that develop through this service. I am particularly appreciative of the warm and loving welcome I receive every year at the Scottish Episcopal Synod, and hope to be invited back in 2025.

## 2.2 Report from General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

Mary Woodward (SE), Katrina McCrea (West) and Susan Mitchell (Asst Clerk, GM)

This year's Assembly began with worship, during which we sang a hymn whose refrain was *All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place* – a sentiment which was evident in much of the business before the Church this week.

The retiring Moderator, Sally Foster-Fulton invited to spend time in silence to gather, and be present, before beginning to pray, asking God not just to hear us but to move us. Referring to the day's reading from the prophet Micah [ch 6, v 8] – *what does the lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God* – she reminded us that we need to DO justice, which is not a task for the fainthearted, “*or we risk sleepwalking into irrelevance*”. We are called to a life of doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly: “*what does that look like? Discuss, debate, decide...*” and sit in silence to reflect on this before moving on to the business of the day.

The new Moderator, Shaw Paterson, was duly installed; the king's representative at the Assembly, the Duke of Edinburgh [aka Prince Edward] was commissioned and addressed us; a letter from the king to the Assembly was read; everybody thanked everybody else; a few essential nuts and bolts were arranged; and we got our first break of the day.

The second session of the day began with the presentation of ecumenical delegates and overseas visitors to the new Moderator – individually walking up to shake his hand – and we were made welcome and thanked for coming. Other bits of business followed, and then delegates and visitors went out into New College quad for the traditional photo with the new Moderator: unusually, not lined up on that incredibly long staircase but at right angles to it, as the sun was Simply Too Bright...

The afternoon's main business was to receive and discuss the Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee's report. This is wide-ranging and well worth reading [readily accessible on the Church of Scotland's General Assembly website, alongside all the other reports]. Ross Blackman, the committee's convenor, took up the new Moderator's theme of *Building Together* – we are building together the Church in Scotland. *Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it*: all the denominations work together, despite our differences. As we work together, it can be difficult to see any progress – but progress has been made. Some work is done behind the scenes; many people, including the Ecumenical Officers Forum, on which I represent Quakers in Scotland, were thanked; and Ross concluded *What a foundation we have to build on*.

Many of the ecumenical delegates present commented favourably on the report and its remarkable scope, one remarking that *diversity is our superpower*, another speaker saying she was inspired by the sight of so many ecumenical visitors. Others offered their sympathy and support for the challenging financial situation facing the Church of Scotland and celebrated the recent St Columba and St Margaret Declarations with the Scottish Episcopal Church and Roman Catholic bishops in Scotland respectively.

The bit of business that most nearly concerned me was regarding the Scottish Christian Forum and the future of ACTS. Ross Blackman acknowledged that progress here was slower than had been hoped, but that “*we were getting there*” and he was encouraged by the progress to date. Mark Slaney, Chair of the Methodist Church in Scotland, likened our progress to that of cyclists – riders, not racers – going at an “*agreed common pace of travel so that we travel side by side*”, and noted that the simpler form of the Scottish Christian Forum has doubled the number of churches participating compared to ACTS. The Assembly duly approved the form of the Scottish Christian Forum, and the participation of representatives of the Church of Scotland within it, and recognised it as the National Ecumenical Body within Scotland.

A later motion commended the Church of Scotland for its work with the Roman Catholic bishops, the Scottish Episcopal Church [SEC] and the United Reformed Church [URC]. Lindsey Sanderson, Moderator of the URC in Scotland, spoke of her happiness to have already been part of the conversation with the Church of Scotland despite only recently being installed in the post, and reminded us that we need not just to stay within our comfort zones in these conversations, but to “*make our way to the limits of what is possible, and go to the liminal space*”.

Katrina McCrea attended the Assembly Service at St Giles’ on the Sunday, and together we attended the Moderator’s lunch for ecumenical and overseas delegates in the New Town Church on George Street. This was a welcome alteration to the Assembly timetable, as up to now this meal has been held after the Moderator’s Reception on the Monday night, meaning a late night for all concerned. As ever, I enjoyed the opportunity to talk to other delegates – and had the delightful surprise of finding that my mild addiction to Korean drama on Netflix enabled me to have a fascinating conversation with the representative from one of the Presbyterian Churches in South Korea.

### **Katrina’s report is here...**

I was invited to attend the Morning Service in St Giles Cathedral on Pentecost Sunday and lunch in the New Town Church on George Street, both in Edinburgh.

Walking into St Giles, I found a seat; second row from the front - I do like to see what’s going on. After being asked to move, just across the aisle, I found myself in the wonderful company of the Moderators wife Christine and her

family. We had a lively conversation, before the service began and sadly, I didn't get a chance to speak to her again for the rest of the day.

It has been a long time since I attended a Church of Scotland service and felt quite at home, probably due to the fact I was brought up in the CoS faith. The service was lovely, and I particularly enjoyed the Rt Rev Dr Shaw James Paterson's sermon. He has a no nonsense, down to earth and humorous approach and I think he will be a brilliant Moderator.

With three hours free before lunch, I made my way to Central Edinburgh's Meeting for Worship. A deep and restorative experience. So revitalised, I made my way to lunch. At my table, I met a wonderful couple and their son from Zambia, Martin from Switzerland and a Bishop and his wife from England. To my shame, I have lost my notes with their full names. Over a delicious meal, we had rich and exciting conversations about religion, travel, families, and issues of managing change. An interesting day of coming together and sharing universal concerns as well as joys.

## **Back to Mary**

Monday began with a communion service in which I felt welcome and involved. We were reminded that we all belong here, that no-one is above anyone else, and that we each have gifts. When we are called, all we have to do is say "I am here" – God will equip us. How, and in what way, am I called to love my neighbour? We were invited to spend a little time introducing ourselves to our neighbours, and this invitation was accepted in a big way. The distribution and reception of communion was accompanied by a solo singer – *Christ our peace, you break down the walls that divide us* – and this was followed by silence, a very welcome blessing to us all.

The day's business was full-on, as ever. The Procedure Committee, the Assembly Trustees, the Registration of Ministries Committee, the Church Hymnary Trustees all reported. The Assembly Trustees agree that *the Church's financial situation demands further urgent attention supported by a focus on the agreed priorities*. Only 29% of ministries are fully funded by their congregation, and limited resources are being stretched even further – so much goes on supporting ministry, there's little left for any other work.

My attention was drawn to a section in the report which said that there will be a review of the Scottish Storytelling Centre/ John Knox House. As someone who worked there for a while, it's dear to my heart, so I made enquiries about this. The building belongs to the Church of Scotland but operates at a loss: the review is a part of the review of the whole Church, and needs to look at the benefits the building gives to the Church in return for its cost...

The other two bits of business in which I was particularly interested concerned the Church's attitude to transgender people and the question of assisted dying. In 2023 the Assembly instructed the Theological Forum to "*explore the*

*theology of transgender identities within the context of the Church's life and ministry" and report to this year's Assembly. The Forum's report Transgender Identities in the Church of Scotland is another document well worth reading: it concludes "the Theological Forum would urge the exercise of charity and grace on all sides in the handling of this debate. All participants in these debates should remember that rhetoric in this area directly impacts real people. The vital point we wish to assert is really very simple. Transgender people are part of the Church of Scotland and they are welcome".* The discussion that followed was conducted kindly and respectfully, with mostly positive and welcoming contributions. The general sense was that *treating everyone the same is basic Christianity – this we can agree, and that's what the report is saying.* The report was received and commended to congregations, Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries for study – I would urge you to do the same.

The other subject I was really interested in is that of Assisted Dying. Last year's Assembly voted to move beyond the Church's previous position of 'we're against it' and to set up a working group to produce a report for Assembly 2025. This year's interim report was dealt with kindly, with views for and against listened to respectfully. Lindsey Sanderson of the URC welcomed the collaborative work between the denominations; a vet reminded us that death is an ethical concern, "*not just an academic issue*" – we must be concerned for people's welfare and not permit them to suffer. A Marie Curie report on Palliative Care in Scotland was mentioned – again, this is well worth finding and reading.

**Susan Mitchell, our Assistant GM Clerk, attended the Tuesday: her report is here...**

This was the day for reports from the Social Care Council, the Guild and the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team FAPLT.

'Scotland's care sector is in crisis and the system is in danger of collapse' - Rev Thom Riddell, convener of CrossReach, the Church of Scotland's social care arm, appealed to Kirk members to lobby MSPs after he presented the Social Care Council report. He revealed that low pay rates were the biggest challenge to recruitment and retention of staff across the care sector.

Following last year's General Assembly, the Church of Scotland joined over 400 faith leaders in signing a declaration highlighting the issue of fair pay as a matter of justice, fairness and equality, while the then Moderator, Very Rev Sally Foster Fulton and staff from CrossReach and the Faith Action Leadership and others, had continued to engage with the Scottish Government over their concerns.

Despite some successes, Rev Riddell told the General Assembly, there was still much to do, with recruitment and retention a major issue for CrossReach and the wider sector, which sees a 25% turnover of staff. In the discussion Sally Foster-Fulton spoke powerfully about the need to address this issue.



The Guild, one of Scotland's largest voluntary organisations, is celebrating a 'remarkable achievement' after raising almost £500,000 for its current projects. Convenor Rae Lind spoke of projects here in Scotland, where they have partnered with BEAT, an organisation for people and their relatives with eating disorders which helps people get the support and help they need. The Guild is concerned that in Scotland almost 3000 children entered the care system last year so it works with Home for Good which, with the help of local churches, encourages Christian families in Scotland to offer fostering, adoption, or supported lodgings for teenagers. The Guild also has projects in a number of countries overseas. A delegate from Malawi, a country where the impact of climate change is felt deeply, and deforestation has added to the problems people face, thanked the Guild for their help planting trees.

The National Youth Assembly no longer takes place but we heard from young members of LIFT, (Love In Fellowship and Trust) both in person and by video about the work they are doing with 18-30 year-olds.

This year I did manage to go to a lunchtime fringe event - **The Church in the World Today** - at St Columba's by the Castle. We heard from representatives from churches in South Korea, Malawi, Hungary and Israel Palestine. I was struck by the fact that Korea has over 100 different Presbyterian denominations. We were reminded that it is a country with allegedly the highest suicide and divorce rates in the world and the lowest birth rate. Rev Szabina Sztojka of the Reformed Church in Hungary, spoke movingly about the discrimination she has faced as a Roma woman both in society and in the church and of the work she is doing to support the Roma community. A young Palestinian, born in Jordan though she had never set foot in Palestine, urged us to pray for her country.

After lunch the worship was led by the Threshold Glasgow Makaton<sup>1</sup> Choir which you can watch here [https://youtu.be/miP2yB\\_OzjY](https://youtu.be/miP2yB_OzjY) - this will also give a glimpse of the atmosphere in the Assembly Hall.

'The Church of Scotland has been engaged in a season of transition for some time but is now moving from a challenging and uncertain moment towards preparing for growth.'

That is the view of Rev Tommy MacNeil, convener of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team, (FAPLT) as work to implement presbytery mission plans takes effect. I have to confess that I have not studied the Presbytery Mission Plan in depth and much of the afternoon's proceedings passed me by. Ministers of the Church of Scotland are fond of Biblical references and they seem to pop up all over the place. They also speak at length -both the clerk and the Moderator (when it was Sally Foster-Fulton's turn to take the chair) referred to the need to be succinct, KISS - keep it simple for Sally! (I did

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<sup>1</sup>Makaton is a communication tool with speech, signs and symbols to enable all people with disabilities or learning disabilities to communicate

wonder if ministers find it particularly difficult to keep it short as they are so used to delivering sermons.) One delegate raised a point of order about the need for the church of Scotland to communicate better. This was highlighted for me when another delegate, clearly out of touch with what the church had been saying, said she thought that church should have done more on Gaza ‘In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.’ – Martin Luther King Jr. She was reminded of all the times that the church through the Moderator had not been silent and had spoken out in the past year.

The Hungarian delegate thanked the Church of Scotland for the support they have given to Ukrainian refugees in Hungary.

There were numerous references to money and throughout the long day I had ringing in my ears the words of a former CEO of the Retreat – ‘no money no mission’.

The change in arrangements for PVG certificates, study leave for ministers in their first 5 years and then the costs for visas for ministers coming to work in Scotland from abroad, to name a few. For one minister and his family it was £19,000 before coming and then £14,000 for renewal. He said “It is not news to us when we get here but I wanted to highlight the predicament that many of us find ourselves in, especially colleagues who are yet to find charges.”

In the afternoon I hoped to be able to speak to a motion in support of Quaker funding for the EAPPI programme and asking the Church of Scotland to reinstate their grant to EAPPI which they had withdrawn. However in the small print on the Agenda it says **Note** *It is hoped that this timetable will be adhered to but items could arise earlier or later than the times specified...* and so this item did not arise until the following day when happily Mary was able to speak to it. Instead we heard Overtures from a couple of Presbyteries. I found this confusing and hard to follow but I was not alone. A professor said that when his students are confused he knows he has not got it quite right, he proceeded to ‘clarify’ the matter which left me more confused! It had been a long day.

Other business that came up included a request that the Church prepare a briefing on the Cass Independent Review of gender identity services for children and young people and a contribution from an Australian delegate in praise of Team Ministries.

### **Back to Mary again**

Much of the business on Wednesday was a bit dry, but there was still plenty to interest me. I’ve written before about the struggle I have with the Chaplains to the Armed Forces section of the business – not that I have any quarrel with the fact that members of the armed forces need to be able to access chaplains, but that we have armed forces in the first place. There were large numbers of

men in uniform, and the Duke of Edinburgh was in attendance. A huge issue for the Church is the declining number of their chaplains – no new candidates have come forward, a number of chaplains will be retiring soon, and numbers ‘are at a historical low’.

There was an impassioned plea on behalf of prison chaplains, who felt they are largely ignored. Mention was made of the possibility of being a cadet chaplain – you don’t have to be an ordained minister, it gives you contact with the young people in your parish, and will enrich your regular ministry.

Each year the Assembly is addressed by a high-ranking member of one of the services, and I usually struggle to listen calmly and kindly to what is being said. This year, Air Vice-Marshal Tim Jones of the RAF did surprisingly well. Basing his address on the hymn *we have an anchor* he mainly avoided jingoism while thanking the chaplains for *supporting the service family and helping us navigate the storms of life*. I still find it impossible that, though members of the armed forces do a lot of good work in many different places, the bottom line is that they are part of a killing machine: but I do have to accept that other people see these things very differently and feel that they have a calling to serve their country in this way. I just wish they didn’t have to.

One part of the deliverance [ie the things they were being asked to agree] being proposed to the Assembly was to Welcome the review by Lord *Etherton KC into the historic treatment of LGBT+ personnel, and urge HM Government to implement the recommendations in full and note with regret any breach, in the past, of the pastoral relationship between Chaplain and military personnel* – this last referring to the fact that some chaplains broke the code of confidentiality and ‘outed’ people to their superior officers...

We also heard from the committee drafting a reply to the king’s letter to the Assembly, the Safeguarding Committee, the Iona Community Board, the Pension Trustees, the Investors’ Trust, the General Trustees, the Housing and Loan Fund Trustees, and the Church of Scotland Trust – goodness knows how they manage to find enough trustees to do all this work. Much of it passed way over my head: I did find it interesting that the Housing and Loan Fund exists to help retired ministers, who have to leave their manses, by buying properties which they can then rent. There are also many other situations where people need help because they can’t afford to buy a house themselves. Currently there are 100 borrowers and 190 tenanted houses, and properties are sold when the need for them is over: and this Fund makes a profit which can be given to the General Trustees for use elsewhere within the Church. Having so much property is not always a negative thing, it seems...

Tuesday’s business ran out of time, and so a section of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team’s business was carried over to Wednesday, to be attended to at the end of what was already a long day. The fact that we

didn't all collapse into a brain-dead heap as we moved into this section was largely due to last year's Moderator, Sally Foster-Fulton, who inspired us to work together as we considered some potentially contentious business, much of which centred on the situation in Israel and Palestine. At one point we heard from a young Palestinian woman whose grandmother had been forced to leave her family lands and go to Jordan: we were then invited to digest this contribution in silence, rather than immediately proceeding to the next item of business.

Justice pilgrimages can help us understand the situation much more clearly. The Churches Together in Britain and Ireland has prayer resources and a reflection resource – *Torn in Two*. Online prayers for peace in the Middle East are held on the 24th of each month. There was a call to urge the Government to call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

And there was a section asking the Church to express gratitude to Britain Yearly Meeting *for its liberality in funding the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) UK and Ireland* and consider reinstating the annual Church of Scotland grant to support EAPPI, which had been discontinued. Susan had been going to speak on Tuesday in support of this: because the business had had to be carried over to Wednesday I offered to deliver Susan's words, which I duly did, with a slight Mary twist in that I mentioned my friend Bron Currie's service as an accompanier. Others spoke in support of the programme and its importance: I am happy to report that this section was approved.

During the course of the afternoon's business, the General Election date was announced, and we were urged to *use and share the resources prepared by the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office... [and]...to promote voter registration and awareness* and think about organizing an election hustings. CTBI resources were also commended to the Kirk, and we were reminded that applying for a postal vote could be a good idea, given that the election takes place in the first week of the school holidays in Scotland.

Thus ended my Assembly 2024 – so many good memories, so many interesting conversations, so many new connections. Now it's 'prepare for the Scottish Episcopal Synod next month' and look forward to the Assembly in 2025. It's fascinating – do let me know if you are interested in representing Quakers in Scotland at any of these gatherings.

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## **2.3 Visit to Finnish and Estonian Friends May 2024**

### **Mary Woodward, SE Scotland AM**

#### **Finland Yearly Meeting 3–5 May 2024 AitO Centre, outside Tampere**

Finland Yearly Meeting has two gatherings each year, in spring and in the autumn. I was delighted to be appointed to represent Britain YM at the Finnish gathering at AitO centre this May.

Finnish Quakers began worshipping together via Zoom during lockdown. Helsinki and Tampere worship groups now meet in person each Sunday. The continuing twice-monthly Zoom meetings are attended both by more isolated Friends and some of those who are also able to join in person worship. I join the Zoom meetings when I am able, as do others who live outside Finland. The numbers vary each time – rarely less than three, sometimes nearer ten. We are always delighted to be joined by Elke in Sweden, who is at most meetings along with her partner Johan and their young daughter Oona.

We had hoped to meet Oona in person at AitO this May, but circumstances prevented her and her parents from joining us. A representative from Ireland YM was also prevented at the last minute, but Sue Glover Frykman represented Sweden YM and Ethel Livermore, Clerk to EMES section of FWCC, also joined the gathering. Some Finnish Friends came for the whole weekend, while others either came for the Saturday, or arrived on the Friday but left on Saturday. In all about twenty Friends were present for all or part of the weekend.

I'd arrived in Helsinki a couple of days early and was delighted to spend time with Sakari and his wife and, separately, Susanne. Sakari offered me a lift to AitO centre, the leisurely journey enabling us to get to know each other much better. Once arrived at AitO, there were old friends to greet and new ones to get to know, including Taina who'd recently started attending on-line worship and had decided to come to the Gathering to widen her Quaker experience. It was lovely to meet her in person and be able to engage in longer conversations than are possible in the general friendly chat surrounding the Zoom worship sessions.

Antti, one of the Tampere Friends, offered us a Friday night Playback Theatre session, in which someone told a short story from their own experience which his group of three actors and one musician played back to us. This was a fascinating way to get to know more about each other while really enjoying the actors' skill in listening to and then improvising the playback of the story, always checking with each participant that they had told it correctly. As an ex-musician myself, I was particularly impressed by the multi-talented musician who used a wide range of instruments and styles instantly to create a mood from which the actors could start their playback.

Most of the Saturday was taken up with the necessary business of the Yearly meeting, which is conducted in Finnish, with whispered translations to assist those of us whose Finnish isn't up to the task. Greetings from the visitors' YMs, the accounts, the progress of the translation of Thomas Kelly's *A Testament of Devotion* into Finnish, the annual report and appointing representatives to events in Finland and abroad were all dealt with. There was discussion about the current newsletter situation – one Friend has been doing it for some time, and feels the need to lay that down. What is the purpose of a newsletter? How can news be circulated? What about the Friends who don't 'do' social media, and are not part of the FaceBook and WhatsApp groups? An informal 'strategy working group' offered itself: the subject will be revisited at the Autumn Gathering.

We were joined for part of the day by two members of the Ecumenical Council of Finland. Established in 1917, it's a forum for co-operation between Finnish Christian communities on social issues – peace and human rights, sustainable future, international responsibility, freedom of religion and belief, and refugees and integrations. I found myself hoping that the slowly-emerging Scottish Christian Forum would develop and grow into something as active and positive.

I was honoured to have been asked to join with Sue Glover Frykman in presenting a session on "*How does Eldership support our Quaker community?*". At present, the two worship groups don't have appointed Elders and, while someone might be appointed Elder for the business sessions, their function is principally to uphold the clerk and the sessions.

Sue and I had asked Jane Rose to be our accompanying Elder, and she helped us design a session which would introduce the concept of Eldership to those Friends who might not know much about it and show its relevance to Finland YM. I gave a brief outline of the history of eldership and pastoral care within early Friends and how these now function in BYM. Sue talked about the practical aspects of eldership, bringing in the concept of *ubuntu* and focusing on the nurturing of individuals and meetings and the supporting of sessions such as the one we were currently giving.

There was a space for questions. A reference to Meeting for Sufferings prompted "why did early Quakers suffer?" "What happens in Africa?" meant a lightning trip through the different 'types' of Quakers around the world. "What happens in Sweden?" – Sue told us of her long experience of Sweden YM.

Friends divided into small groups, one Finnish- and three English-speaking. They were asked to act as if they were at the local worship group Elders' meeting to worshipfully consider various situations and bring a minute outlining their conclusions to the feedback session. Situations included *disturbance (of many kinds) in the Meeting; too little (or too much) spoken ministry; newcomers who appear once but never return; one person always ministering on*

*the same topic in the last ten minutes of Meeting.*

The feedback session was really interesting, with everyone who took part feeling that they ‘really were Elders’, and that the process was really good. The ‘solutions’ were thoughtful and caring. Friends were heartened to be reassured that these sorts of issues are a problem everywhere – “you are not alone”. How do you deal with these things if there’s no-one appointed and thus able to start the process? Helsinki and Tampere worship groups have grown organically, and don’t have clerks, so there’s no authority or mechanism to take action. One Friend at the Tampere worship group gives a brief outline of what’s expected at the start of their Meeting.

The session was designed to invite consideration of the whole topic of Eldership as it relates to Finland Yearly Meeting, not to make any decisions. This topic will be returned to in the autumn.

The theme of the whole weekend was *ubuntu*, in the light of the World Gathering of Friends in South Africa later this year. There is much preparatory material on the FWCC website. It was proposed that zoom preparation and discussion groups be held. Mention was made of additional resources, including a study guide, available on the EMES website, and a suggestion was made of an EMES-wide group joining together on the Sunday. Time zones might make joining some sessions difficult. “*We want to give more time and depth as a community, not just receive the epistle and that’s it*”.

Saturday night was the opportunity for sauna, swimming pool, and social time for those who wanted: always for me one of the highlights of the weekend!

Sunday morning began with Meeting for Worship, after which we went outside to sit in and listen to Aino introducing our next session. It was a joy to be in the sunshine, surrounded by trees and gazing at the lake, after long sessions indoors the previous day. The session was designed for us to reflect inwardly in the company of another *ihminen* [human being, person] who would be a silent witness to what we were telling ourself. We found a partner, and went somewhere quiet, taking it in turns to speak and listen. The first question we were given was fairly simple – *tell something about what’s happening in me right now*: not just what’s in my head, but what my body’s feeling too. The second question went deeper – *tell something about what the sentence mina olen koska sinä olet [I am because you are] brings up in me right now*. We then came back together, and shared anything we felt we wanted to, again focused on myself rather than the person witnessing us. *Ubuntu* extends beyond ‘me’ and ‘you’ to all humans, and to the world in which we live: we are because nature is – we are an integral part of nature, however much we may think we exercise our free will to cut the ties binding us together.

After lunch it was time for the final feedback session – *How was it, Friends?* For me it was another joyful weekend with my Finnish Quaker family, whom I told *I truly am because you are – coming here has changed and continues to*

*change me: I would not be who I am now without you all.*

Through Jane Rose, I had made contact with Roland Rand, an Estonian Friend, and was hoping to meet up with him and other Quakers in Tallinn: unfortunately, things didn't quite work out that way. I stayed overnight in Helsinki and got the ferry the following morning. Roland met me at the ferry terminal and escorted me to the Lutheran Theological Institute in the heart of the Old Town, where I was staying, but then had to go back to work. I met him briefly the following day too, and heard about his voluntary work with Ukrainian refugees, of whom there are very many in Estonia; there wasn't time to have an in-depth Quaker conversation. My ferry back was on the Saturday, so I wasn't able to meet any other Tallinn Friends, who meet most Sundays, either in person or on line. Tallin Old Town is very beautiful, and I was happy to explore it while wishing I could have had Friendly company some of the time.

I had arranged with Gwyndaf that, as on my last visit, he would meet me at my hotel and pilot me to Meeting. We were joined by Synnove, whose company I'd also enjoyed on my last visit to Helsinki. It was Finnish Mothers' Day, so other Friends were elsewhere: I was very glad to be part of Meeting and the conversation afterwards, which continued over lunch in my first Filipino restaurant in a nearby shopping mall.

I had a little time to myself in Helsinki, for which I was grateful after nearly two weeks of moving on every couple of days. I was also delighted to coincide with one of the free admission days to the Ateneum, Finland's national gallery! And then, sadly, I made my way back to Scotland, hoping to be able to attend the Autumn Gathering in September.

I am very grateful both to Britain Yearly Meeting for appointing me to attend Finland YM, and also to the Francis Camfield Trust for supporting me financially. Because of the BYM appointment, which funded much of my travel costs, I still have some Trust money, which I will use for my next Finnish trip. In addition to the formal letter of greeting from Quakers in Britain, our General Meeting for Scotland Clerk Michael Hutchinson wrote a letter loving greetings to Finnish Friends on behalf of Friends in Scotland. In reply, their Clerk, Toni Hämäläinen, wrote

*Dear Michael and Friends in Scotland,*

*We value very much our connections to a wider Quaker family. It was so nice to have Mary with us again. Together we explored the themes of ubuntu and eldership in our communities. It was a rich and spirit led weekend on the shore of lake Näsijärvi.*

*In Friendship*

*Toni Hämäläinen, Clerk, Finland Yearly Meeting.*



## 2.4 Visit to Central European Yearly Meeting May 2024 Buša Cochrane-Muir, East Scotland AM

Central European Yearly Meeting (CEYM) celebrated their first anniversary as a Yearly Meeting. There were some 50 Friends present and on zoom from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Australia meeting together as the youngest Yearly Meeting in Europe. Greetings were received from many Quaker Yearly Meetings highlighting membership in the wider Quaker family. It was inspiring to see at first hand how united CEYM is with Friends from such a wide area across Central Europe.

The programme was full throughout with some time to deepen friendships and exchange experiences. Our main speaker was Ben Pink Dandelion who spoke of the key threads of the Quaker way describing what has changed over time and what has stayed the same. This was followed in small groups meeting to find answers within ourselves about what drew us to Quakers; what could we do to deepen our spiritual life and what practical steps could lead us in this direction?

One Friend has been appointed to create an Archive of the past 30 years of CEYM. She gave a progress report and a slideshow of photos over the years. This brought back many memories. And the Saturday we gathered together for a 2 hour MfW from which we all felt the benefit.

Tracey Martin, Director of QCEA, Brussels led us in an interactive presentation about the work of QCEA. She then encouraged Friends to take samples to sew and post to her to give to the new MEPs in September to foster our humanity.

Another Friend who had gained her PhD at Woodbrook regarding Feurstein's method in the education of children. A valuable presentation on Sustainability gave us further incite into how damaged our Earth has become but with possible solutions if only those in Power and Business would acknowledge and act upon.

And the Saturday evening we were enraptured with songs and tales of Hungarian and other Eastern folklore. The programme was well thought out and really there was something of interest for all who attended. It was a time of much joy and reflection and the deepening of friendships. Discernment played an important part in looking at the process of creating a constitution that would be acceptable by this young YM.

I would like to thank GMfS for once again appointing me to attend.

## 2.5 Congregational Federation in Scotland

### Kate Arnot, SE Scotland AM

#### Kirkcaldy Congregational Church, 1 June 2024

I attended this 30<sup>th</sup> Assembly on behalf of General Meeting. I was pleased to do so as it was being held in Kirkcaldy Congregational Church which is in the town centre. It is a lovely small church, much refurbished with pews removed and comfortable chairs instead. My grannie and 3 aunties and families lived in Kirkcaldy and my family stayed for a week each year in the school summer holidays. I have many good memories of Kirkcaldy. I find there are always joys outwith the ecumenical fellowship and worship of these invites by the churches which made up the Action of Churches Together in Scotland, now evolving, so slowly, into another organisation.

As well as standard agenda items such as reports, including financial, Kirkcaldy has re-joined the Federation and Musselburgh has also joined. There are also new accredited Ministers. Acts of remembrance were noted for those who were a loss to the Federation and their churches but were in glory, heaven's gain. News from the Churches included much that was a sign of service to communities with food banks and other necessities being held in halls, new publications and new developments e.g. a lego club bringing more people into Congregational churches.

There was much emphasis of Congregational churches being a family together in love, friendship and fellowship. But there is a great danger of this family of independent churches putting independence before all else. The Federation will help when it can.

The agenda had a Closing Grace followed by lunch and fellowship. On the day, lunch was followed by being in two groups to help with ideas to plan the future CFS Roadshow which hopes to reconnect with Congregational churches, some are very active with the Federation, some not so. This, I found, to be a very positive discussion, exploring ways to strengthen the Federation with growing numbers and Christ being preached.

As I said there are always joys outwith the ecumenical visit, and, afterwards, I went down and walked along the prom on what may be one of a rare summer sunny day. Sadly the wonderful ice cream shop is no longer there but after 50 years change is to be expected.

The Assembly in 2025 is to be held on 7<sup>th</sup> June in Dundee. This clashes with General Meeting so it may not be possible for us to attend.

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

Hinsley Hall, Leeds 26–28 April 2024

As usual we began our work with a Zoom session on the Wednesday before our in person weekend committee meeting. One delightful task was to appoint buddies for our new committee members, Lucy Faulkner-Gawlinski, Michael Long and Antonia Swinson, as well as for those prevented from attending our meeting. We look forward to getting to know our three new colleagues as we work together.

We received short reports from those of our working and topic groups whose work we did not need to consider at length over the coming weekend. As the list of them now goes up to ‘q’, you can see we are working on a great many things!

On the Friday evening in Leeds we spent time sharing a little about ourselves and our involvement with the committee before talking about our experience of using the anthology sections of *Quaker faith & practice* to help us as we consider the purpose of anthology sections in the new Book.

Saturday was very full-on! Looking again at our project plan and timeline, we were delighted to see that we are on schedule, and hope that this will encourage us as we continue to labour mightily on your behalf. An important part of this work is keeping track of everything we have agreed ‘to revisit at a later stage’...

I was wondering what our work will be once we have got our text ready for the consideration of the full draft by Britain Yearly Meeting – among other things, we will be engaging with Friends around the country, encouraging them to read and submit comments on the text.

We continue to work on the structure of our new book. Seeing how the texts we have already written fit together will help us see if there are ‘bits missing’ which we will need to produce. We continue to work on our writing guidelines as we start to work on topics which have less ‘nuts and bolts’ content and include much more ‘anthology’ material. We can’t put in every single extract we collect – which ones do we use, in which order, and why? What do we not include?

Various texts were agreed ‘good enough’ and banked for now. This includes the one I’ve been working on, *Quaker Approaches to Dying and Death*, which was well received: after a little tweaking it will be banked. The Structure group continues to make progress, and we are all very happy with the ‘tree’ concept: there are, however, continuing challenges where topics overlap – particularly *Close Relationships* [one of mine] and *Personal Journeys*. We need to ensure that our texts reflect a Quaker perspective and how that guides us

in our life while also reflecting the full diversity of our Quaker community.

We continue our work on diversity and inclusion, and wonder whether having a “sensitivity reader” for our text might be helpful. We also continue to consider how and where we might share more text with Friends. We welcomed the progress of our Theology topic group’s work, which aims to reflect the different theological perspectives that make up our British Quaker community.

Looking ahead to Yearly Meeting 2024, we are planning two on line sessions in the week of preparation for BYM. The Communicating with Friends group, of which I am a part, invited all BDRC members who were able to join in either or both of these sessions.

New topic groups were set up – *Friends and other churches/ faiths; Friends and secular bodies*; and *World Family of Friends/ Quakers in the world*. I was both delighted and challenged to be appointed to the last of these three: delighted because it’s a topic I’m both interested and involved in, and challenged because it’s yet another thing to juggle in my increasingly busy life.

There is to be a Future of British Quakerism Conference in October: various of our committee will be leading this, and it is hoped that we will have at least one committee member present at it.

We agreed our pattern of meetings for 2025 – on line at the end of January, and [hopefully] in person in July and October [as BYM is in May]. Our next meeting will be at the University of Warwickshire in Coventry this coming October.

**Please continue to uphold us in our work on your behalf: we are all working hard, and at times finding it difficult to balance the many demands on our time – we can’t do this work without your prayerful support, for which we are very grateful.**

Our key messages:

*We continue to make progress in drafting further topics for the new book and are looking ahead to the tasks we will need to undertake to bring all the topics together as a whole.*

*We are working to include the diversity of Quaker voices in Britain, reflecting the unity and diversity of our shared theology.*

*Ideas for a bold and imaginative structure of the new book are unfolding.*

*We are planning two special interest groups for YM 2024, and thinking about the next phase of engaging Friends with our work as we progress towards having a complete draft of the new book ready for Friends for YM 2027.*

## 4 Parliamentary Engagement Working Group

### 4.1 A Newbie's Reflections on the work of the PEWG Carol Jennings, SE Scotland AM

Towards the end of a three-year stint on the PEWG group as a representative from SESAM, I am just about getting confident navigating the many acronyms used in Scottish politics. Facility with acronyms seems to be an important Quaker skill! Before I forget what it was like to join the PEWG group (then working with Andrew Tomlinson as PEO, now with the equally-skilled Sarah Komashko), I wanted to share some things I've learned as a relative outsider. Hopefully you will be encouraged that political participation both big and small - your political outreach - is valuable and constructive.

The members of PEWG collectively seem to have a fair amount of activist campaigning in their backgrounds and initially it seemed to me like there was a mountain-load of information needed to be able to have a view on the many issues before the group. A small step back, however, and I realised that the complexities of information, data, political processes etc. are vulnerable to the application of Quaker principles. The challenges are much simplified by focusing on Quaker perspectives such as stewardship, integrity and the encouragement to listen to each other in humility and understanding. Note I didn't say made "easy" but perhaps the inner light, if we pay attention, shows the (often twisty) way forward, and I do believe that it is helpful to have a group of people upholding each other in the PEWG work and holding meetings in a Quaker fashion. The support of GM, of course, is behind all our work.

Back in 2022 I stepped in for the PEO to attend a Circular Economy event exploring the legislative proposals with various stakeholders and hearing from Lorna Slater who was Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity at the time. She asked for help - for information and for clear demands during the upcoming consultation. This definitely brought me a greater understanding of how important the expertise of external groups is to the workings of parliament. Legislators need concrete examples and well-developed policy ideas to successfully create big changes, but they don't have the resources to gather all of that all of the time. Of course, not all the evidence and lobbying will come from groups such as Friends of the Earth Scotland, but will include petro-chemical companies and others whose motivations are presumably driven by profit. Listening to the stakeholders, who brought clear requests for targets and could show examples of great policies elsewhere in Europe (and elsewhere in Britain - Wales has enjoyed some recycling successes!), I realised that the PEWG group will rarely have the deep expertise of some of these individuals, but we can support their work by remaining involved in umbrella groups such as Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and championing particular campaigns. When approaching legislators for support for

specific motions, bills or amendments, I believe that the Quaker voice might be taken as a more general ask from a constituent group which is known for its commitment to integrity. The testimonies which call for action towards peace and sustainable living on earth are a bedrock from which to make our appeals, which is a different sort of basis than “expertise” but perhaps grants us a more receptive audience.

My first physical foray into Holyrood was to help with the Peace Education exhibit last autumn and I witnessed a lot of interactions between MSPs and got to speak with a few of them about the project. It was clear that the Scottish Parliament, being quite small, has a quite personal feel, with cross-party relationships being facilitated by repeated working on committees together. Several MSPs were strongly attracted to the early-education part of the Peace Education practices and others stopped in their tracks by a graph showing the savings in costly interventions when schools implemented peer mediation amongst teens. Many MSPs remarked that any new legislation needed to be cost-neutral to succeed as the budget was so tight.

Following on from Lesley Morrison’s Time for Reflection, I attended the Climate and Health event at Holyrood sponsored by PEWG and MedAct (discussed by Martin Pippard in the June 24 Scottish Friend) and for the first time I saw MSPs from different parties able to actively support and engage with the same ideas. This was a lightbulb moment for me, especially as a person with a health career background - that health not only was a great entry point to help people acknowledge the dangers of climate change, but was a strong cross-party non-contentious win-win topic. Echoes back to the smiles from MSPs about education with Peace Education. Supporting either of these sectors of politics will not immediately stir controversy, so there is some soft ground for developing strategies which all parties may be able to support.

More recently, I joined in a zoom meeting with Maurice Golden MSP, who has been very active in working on positive amendments on the Circular Economy bill. A few PEWG members, Sarah Komashko, PEO and two other Quakers who had been corresponding with Maurice about climate issues met to have a friendly exploration about where government is at and how Quakers might best help instigate change. He was very generous with his time and had some interesting insights and reminders (and Sarah was generous with the resource links she shared with his office after the meeting!). Maurice reflected that it would be good to have more ways to encourage cross-party relationships to help stop “tribalism” and reminded us that the best opportunity for cross-party collaboration is at the beginning of a government. The closer an election, the less collaboration, thus, the less substantive legislative work gets done. He suggested that 100 emails to an MSP inbox generated by a website have less impact than a single personal email from a constituent who has experience about the subject (\* hint-hint you, yourself may be that constituent. Don’t be shy if you have a burning concern! find your MSP by

using a postcode search here: <https://www.parliament.scot/msps>)

Towards the end of our call with Maurice Golden, he said that it was necessary for politicians to take some risks, understanding that some choices will not work out and that honesty and action will lead to some amount of backlash. Knowing that we have a receptive time of post-election cross-party working ahead, please consider reaching out to your MSP about issues that are important to you. It really helps politicians to have constituent voices in their inbox so they can claim those as motivations for their positions. If you do not speak up, the louder voices, by default, will be the usual interests of business and industry (plenty of fossil fuel and military here lobbying at Holyrood). Could I ask you to consider if you might be willing to take a risk of sorts, to get out of your comfort zone, and engage with Scottish politics. It needn't be a huge commitment of time or energy. If you would like to be alerted to occasional opportunities to contact MSPs about issues related to Quaker concerns such as climate justice, economic justice or peace, contact Sarah our PEO on [sarah@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sarah@quaker.org.uk). And if you have a particular reflection which might inspire our parliamentarians to approach their work with open hearts, do consider contacting PEWG [[richardjraggett@gmail.com](mailto:richardjraggett@gmail.com)] about submitting a "Time for Reflection" piece - a very short presentation before MSPs. For inspiration and enjoyment, I encourage you to watch Mark Bittel's (Central Edinburgh Meeting) Time for Reflection on integrity presented in May, see <https://www.scottishparliament.tv/meeting/time-for-reflection-may-28-2024>.



Photograph 4: A view of An Ruadh-stac from Choirè Garbh.

## 5 Climate Matters

### 5.1 Greenwash won't wash with the testimonies Carolyn Burch, North Scotland AM

On Monday 10 June Richard and I took part in an XR Scotland demonstration outside the Shell building in Aberdeen: the 'still-pumping' heart of the British oil and gas industry. Our main focus points were:

- Shell is reneging on its [far from adequate] stated targets for reducing fossil fuel extraction and transitioning to renewable energy production
- Shell is being dishonest about carbon offsetting to justify continued exploration and extraction
- Workers in the oil industry are themselves asking for an urgent just transition away from fossil fuel jobs, as documented by Friends of the Earth Scotland's report 'Our Power' [ <https://foe.scot/resource/report-our-power-offshore-workers-demands-for-a-just-energy-transition/> ]

By coincidence, the chance to take part in this action came just as our local meeting (Forres, North Scotland) is due to have a 'June Fifth Sunday' discussion on the topic of the Quaker testimonies. So while we stood in Aberdeen I was thinking – how are the testimonies helping me, here?

**Sustainability** – a self-evident connection!

**Simplicity** – we simply need to live with less; it's not only a matter of switching to 'green' energy supplies (batteries manufactured with coal power in China???) and certainly not of relying on false/unproven solutions such as carbon capture and storage, but of rethinking our 'needs'. Can I centre down my thoughts to focus on drawing inspiration from Friends who truly live simply? I have to recognise that sometimes I waste my own 'energy' guiltily trying to suppress envy of wealthy Friends! And to many, my own life would seem very self-indulgent. I need to look at my own greenwashing tendencies!

**Equality** - Looking at many closed-down shops in central Aberdeen, while high-powered cars zoom past us along Union Street, it seems that while the many are already living with less because the choice is being forced upon them, the few are getting and spending and laying waste their (and our) 'powers'. My sports car days are over but from a global perspective of course I am one of the few. The seduction of wealth, glamour and speed is strong, and our brains are very good at disassociating our own pleasures from others' deprivations. What do I do about this, beyond righteously ranting?

**Peace** – our demonstration was peaceful (apart from some singing that was more heartfelt than harmonious), and the police presence, though very noticeable, was benign, even friendly, even though two other activists had 'locked on' to a green washing machine. Were we disturbing the peace? Or were



we right to rattle the peace of mind of employees arriving at Shell? Some were very stressed and a few were verbally aggressive, but others were polite, even smiling, and were willing to take our leaflets about why we were there. But of course peace in the international and domestic sense is hugely fragile and threatened by the way our greedy damage is driving our beautiful living planet to the brink, and making it unliveable in many places already. I'm so grateful to Friends who are working strongly for peaceful approaches to growing tensions - locally but also at QCEA and QUNO.

**Truth and Integrity** – I was glad to be at this XR action and have a great admiration for the faithful who organise them and take risks for the sake of the truth. But to feel that I was in the right place as a Friend, I was very glad to have the opportunity to hold this particular banner. There are such messy questions around fossil fuels. Do we need the oil companies' expertise to develop carbon capture? There's a whole confusing spectrum of motivation, from money moving between 'friends in high places', via a (sometimes well-meaning) dependency on perpetual 'growth', to real social justice concerns, around the just transition arguments. But we desperately need to defy the greenwash and replace wishful thinking with active change. As Friends I hope our small role can be to build more truthfulness and integrity around how, or even whether, we can alter our way of being to respect and protect each other and our wonderful green and blue one-and-only earth.



Photograph 5: Carolyn and Richard outside Shell building in Aberdeen .

## 6 Community Matters

### 6.1 Memories of a chocolate millionaire's mansion David O'Donoghue, Monkstown Meeting

Anyone who's ever bitten into a bar of Cadbury's chocolate will have an affinity with George Cadbury who inherited the sweet-toothed empire from his father in 1861. At the end of the 1800s Cadbury was living in a mansion called Woodbrooke in Bourneville near Selly Oak, Birmingham.

After retiring in 2017, I got to know the big house when doing voluntary work there as a Friend in Residence (FiR). As such, I was part of a four-strong team ensuring a Quaker presence and undertaking many duties from preparing the Quiet Room for morning worship to overseeing the evening Epilogue.

The work also included giving half-hour tours of the house. My favourite part of being a guide was to explain that Cadbury had to leave his home in 1903 because it was too small for him, his second wife and a growing family (including many children from his deceased first wife). Conveniently, George had an even bigger mansion, the Manor House in nearby Northfield, and thus Woodbrooke became a Quaker study centre.

By the time I got there five years ago there were no long-term resident students, but Woodbrooke had evolved into a bustling 80 bedroom premises. The enterprise ran at almost 100% occupancy all year round and numerous activities were catered for, not all of them Quaker-related. The FiRs' office was always busy with people dropping in to see if we could solve problems such as lost phone chargers or train timetables. An elderly lady said she could not sleep without a proper feather pillow, could I help? Yes of course I could. A dash to the linen room upstairs and a clean pillow case sorted things out.

During numerous trips back to Woodbrooke I met an astonishing array of people. One who remains in my memory was a blind lady who had worked as a professional harpist before retirement. She was fun to chat to at supper time.

A gentleman I met at breakfast was availing of Woodbrooke's B&B facilities so he could have a cardiac check-up at the nearby Queen Elizabeth hospital.

Sadly, Woodbrooke closed its doors on 31 October 2023 – a victim of the Covid lockdown and high maintenance costs. The future of the buildings and ten-acre gardens is now in the hands of the Bourneville Village Trust.

Whenever I think of my time there, the memories come flooding back. There was Denis the Woodbrooke tabby who stretched out along the patio on warm summer mornings. When the sun got too hot he'd retire to a corrugated structure around the corner to rest in the cool shade. Denis was the opposite of a cat on a hot tin roof and knew his patch well.

Then there was the man who arrived one evening seeking a room for the night. I checked him in at the reception desk and as I handed over his key he told me his wife had thrown him out for drinking too much. He then asked if we served drink in the bar, but I had to explain: ‘This is a Quaker establishment, so there’s no alcohol.’ He looked downcast and went off to his room. I looked out for him at breakfast but he was nowhere to be seen. I wonder what became of him.

Some of Woodbrooke’s activities will continue, including online tuition and face-to-face courses at locations around Britain. And no doubt George Cadbury would be content that things are still ticking over even if his old home has closed down.



Photograph 6: Stac Pollaidh.

## 6.2 Working Together with Faiths

### Sila Collins-Walden, North Scotland AM

**Woodbrooke / Quaker Committee for Interfaith Relations, (QCCIR) Course, High Leigh Conference Centre, Hertfordshire. 15-17 March. In person and on-line. I attended on-line.** I thought this course would be helpful not just to me but perhaps to Friends and other faiths who are involved in Interfaith / Interchurch work.

I have represented Inverness Quakers at Inverness Interfaith group for nine years. The work we do with other faiths really matters. Sharing experiences with other faiths can bring many benefits, social interaction, joys, learning and working together, sharing hopes and inspiring one another.

This course began on a Friday evening, starting with an introduction to the work of QCCIR, and then sharing our experiences of Interfaith / Interchurch work.

Who are or what is QCCIR, Quaker Committee for Interfaith Relations? It's an organization that supports Quakers in Britain in their work with other religious faiths, in spiritual and human values and the pursuit of common goals. It does this by reflecting on Quaker insights and values, and by supporting Friends to enter into the life and witness of other faith groups to create bonds of friendship and mutual understanding. It also appoints Friends to represent Quakers at multifaith events. Not all Christians belong to QCCIR.

The speakers at the conference were: Elaine Green, clerk to QCCIR, Quaker Committee For Christian Interfaith Relations. Guest speaker was Maureen Sier, director of Interfaith Scotland. Co-ordinating the event was Judith Baker, Conciliation and Peace building Co-ordinator and Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer at Friends House.

Janet Scott, a member of Cambridge meeting, an author and tutor, introduced the session. She asked what do we learn from being involved in interchurch / interfaith work? Janet said that the purpose of this conference was to see what we can learn, learning is just as important as teaching! She asked us to take back this learning to our meetings and talk to Friends about what we can do working with other faiths. Make it interesting, ask friends to tell their stories, their experience, their journeys of being involved with other faiths and churches, and perhaps on how they arrived at Quakers!

Elaine introduced us to Interchurch work and Churches coming together. She spoke of John Punshon who was a Quaker Studies tutor at Woodbrooke Centre, and the author of *A Portrait In Grey, A Short History of The Quakers*. Punshon wrote of the 18<sup>th</sup> century shift where Quakers had an inward sense of self. They closed ranks, they became a peculiar people. A spiritual aristocracy! A Protestant Revolution in England had created the conditions that allowed for more freedoms. Punshon states: If there were only one faith, it

would result in tyranny, if there were two faiths they would be at each others throats, but if there were thirty or more they could all live and work together quite happily.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century Quakers found it useful to co-operate with other churches in their social witness. However, there were marked differences, liberal Quakerism had taken hold in both Britain and the US. They found themselves diverse among some Christian groups.

We heard from guest speaker Maureen Sier, who has been director of Interfaith Scotland for thirteen years. She spoke of her journey and how she arrived at the Bahai faith. She grew up in Elgin in a secular household, but she attended Sunday school, so she did have a Christian education. She worked in a fish factory after leaving school without any qualifications. One day she saw a local exhibition on the Bahai faith, it spoke to her so she told her mother she was now a Bahai! She didn't want to return to the fish factory. She did discover she was the only Bahai in the village! By this time she was 26 and married and had four children. She eventually went on to do religious studies on an access course and then studied for a PhD in Samoa! Working with indigenous peoples was a delight, she said. Maureen summed up her journey: Awareness, Encounter, Curiosity, Engagement and Appreciation.

The work of Interfaith Scotland is about dialogue and engagement with all faiths including refugees and asylum seekers.

The Scottish Government has a proud history in support of interfaith engagement and has funded many faith events in Scotland. As a result of a devolved Scottish parliament, faith has a voice. A faith to celebrate all faiths, the creation of a faith community in Scotland.

Following the appointment of Hassan Joudi as a trustee to IFN (Interfaith Network) Communities Secretary Michael Gove in the Conservative Westminster government decided to withdraw funding (£150,00) for Interfaith Network UK. Hassan Joudi is a former deputy secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). The government made no specific allegations against Mr. Joudi. The MCB is a broad representative body of British Muslims with membership of around 500 mosques, Muslim schools and charities, but the MCB is a group the Westminster government refuses to engage with. The government has been accused by certain members of parliament of shutting down the main forum for Jewish and Muslim dialogue. Interfaith Network UK closed in April 2024. Considering that there is a huge increase at present in Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism it would seem to be all the more important to build friendships not barriers.

There was a discussion of the Generation Z. (GEN Z) Well I must say recently I became familiar with this as I have a flurry of nieces and nephews all under 25! They are the first group that have grown up with Artificial Intelligence (AI).

I am often around young Friends and young people. I meet many of them on various campaigns, climate justice and peace marches. Some young people are anxious, fearful and uncertain about the future. They don't usually identify as religious, but are realistic, they can be pragmatic and inspiring too.

We can welcome diversity of faiths, create friendships and break down barriers. Just recently Inverness Quakers worshipped with the Methodists in a celebration of George Fox's four hundredth anniversary. An exhibition was set up in the entrance of the church along with a display giving a brief history of Fox's journey to the North of England. The minister spoke of Fox and his arrival at Swarthmoor Hall and meeting with Margaret Fell. Some Friends spoke of what the silence meant to them. We later joined the congregation for refreshments and chat.

A peace vigil was held at Pluscarden in June organized by Interfaith Scotland. A group gathered in the chapel to sit in silence for 15 minutes. The bell was rung and everyone went outside for a photo shoot. There was a good attendance by the many different faiths.

The key is sharing hopes and working together.



Photograph 7: Vigil at Pluscarden.

### 6.3 An interest group or a concern

#### Margaret Roy, West Scotland AM

This question would seem to strike at the heart of what many of us would call the rot in modern Quakerism. It also begs the question, what is a ‘concern’? In a recent altercation, I came to realise that a concern is not a complaint although that is increasingly the common usage . . . “I am concerned . . .” Much more of a worry is that a failure to see a concern as the leadings of the Spirit in the traditional Quaker fashion is to lend credence to the increasing secularisation and institutionalisation of the (Religious) Society of Friends.

Here in Scotland, many of us are stirred by the reorganisation of structures that appear to be imposed on us from down south and by complying with secular rules. We are by no means in unity. What first appeared as sensible option, on deeper scrutiny, now seems further imbalance, looking outwards but losing Spirit, now called ‘community’. Those more interested in a spiritual life are by their nature quieter and even less active as in activism, our silence taken as acquiescing.

We have stood by whilst our ‘old fashioned’ words are re-interpreted to help those newer to Quakers to understand. But look closely. The re-interpretation to modern taste is pandering to the thinking mind, to the intellect, the Ego, and it loses the mystery that is at the heart of religion, the unknowable Spirit. The thinking mind needs to analyse and make clear, the Unknowable. Quakerism is an experiential religion, a dialogue with the Unknown.

When the Spirit moves to initiate a concern, it is compelling. It is more than an insight and often it is disturbing to the normal process of life. Frequently it is unwanted. It can make the recipient very unpopular.

Regards Options for Scotland, many can be seen as resisting change, old-fashioned and out of date. The number attending Area Meetings and General Meeting may be impressive, quoting a recent article in *The Friend*, but the numbers do not represent a percentage, and they do not reach the silent majority who avoid Area Meetings and General Meetings because they have become business meetings. If topics are dealt with, they are of ‘interest’. As Quakers , we increasingly look outwards to change the world. We can be well regarded for our insightful and creative contributions, but are these of the Spirit founded in Love? Can we trust the Unknowable? Live with Uncertainty?

We waddle around in a cloud of self-righteousness. How deep does the air of calm go? When we cloak ourselves with ‘right causes’, we may smile into the mirror but does the mirror smile back at us to engage the depths of our Soul, the naked meaning of life itself. Can we dispense with the masks of the Ego to listen to the inner voice. How many Quakers today can hear the inner voice?

As well as turning our reforming zeal outwards to change society, the Lamb's War is two edged. It also recognises that real change starts with ourselves, the inner dialogue. When the Spirit moves, when we are touched by the Light, can we identify and follow our concerns?

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