



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

Report to Meeting for Sufferings

December 2024

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Paper circulated to Meeting for Sufferings

Fifth report to Meeting for Sufferings: December 2024

Introduction

1. Following Minute 31 of Yearly Meeting 2018, Meeting for Sufferings established the Book of Discipline Revision Committee, to bring to Yearly Meeting draft text for adoption as BYM's book of discipline, together with proposals for its publication. We first met in May 2019. This is our fifth progress report, following those in 2020 to 2023.

Our work so far

2. BDRC is a diverse committee of 26 members now (listed towards the end of this report), reflecting the breadth of Britain Yearly Meeting, as required by our Terms of Reference. To date we have held 21 meetings (some spread over several days) of the full committee. In 2024 two of these have been residential weekend meetings face-to-face, by special permission; the others online. We

have also continued to work hard individually and in various subgroups on specific topics, and held check-in zoom committee meetings to keep track of these. Some of us are struggling with this demanding work alongside other calls on our time and energy, and some have needed to step back from our work for a while for health or other reasons.

3. We had earlier identified around 30 discrete major topics to be included as core material in the new book of discipline. Not all of them equate to chapters in the present Quaker faith & practice, and some include a range of sub-topics.
4. The main topics are listed in Annex A, broadly in the order in which we have worked on them, and with provisional titles. For two of these – Marriage and Nominations – we had shared sample draft texts (including audio versions) with Friends through Meeting for Sufferings in 2023, and received useful feedback. After careful consideration, we have decided not to share further sample draft texts widely with Friends before issuing a complete first draft of the new book in 2026. Sharing sample drafts and considering feedback involves you and us in a lot of work. We do not think it is the best way to engage Friends with our task, or the best use of the Committee’s time and energy, at this stage. We are looking instead at other possible ways of engaging Friends with our work and our approach to the new book before 2026.
5. By the end of 2024 or early 2025, we hope to have “banked”, as good enough for now, substantive drafts on some 25 topics. We are also continuing to work on the overall structure and shape and sequencing of the book, and on engaging with and capturing the voices of children and young people. We have adopted detailed project plans and timelines for the phases of work up to 2030 – see paragraphs 6 and 7 below.

Our immediate next steps

6. During 2025, we hope to
 - draft text on the remaining main topics not yet covered, aiming at completion by around the end of the year
 - update the material we have prepared on Quaker meeting structures in Britain (which already takes account of YM 2024 decisions on a continuing yearly meeting) to reflect the outcomes of the further detailed work that YM 2024 asked to be brought back to YM 2025 – we are liaising closely with Church Government Advisory Group on some parts of this, and we ask to be kept in touch with other parts being done by YM Agenda Committee, Meeting for Sufferings and BYM Trustees

- resume drafting text on membership, depending on the outcome of the exploration initiated by Meeting for Sufferings and any decisions by Yearly Meeting on this
- start the substantial process of bringing the topic texts together as a coherent and consistent whole; auditing for any gaps in material; writing introductions and linking passages; editing for consistency, coherence, accessibility, language and voice; putting into BYM's house style; checking quotations and copyright; cross-referencing and indexing; and identifying the supplementary material needed. We are working with the BYM content and publications staff team on who will do what, when and how.

Our longer-term timetable

7. We are confident that we are on track to present:
 - a. to a YM in 2027 a complete first draft text of the new Book of Discipline for the start of the process of familiarisation and initial discernment, engaging Friends with the text and our approach to the book – an extended “meeting for learning” – resulting in clear guidance to BDRC on the next steps; and
 - b. (after a period of further learning and consultation with Friends throughout Britain, any revision required, and further familiarisation), to a YM in 2030 a complete final text for adoption.
8. We hope that the complete first draft can be made available to Friends throughout Britain before the end of 2026 to allow for thorough reading and discussion in preparation for a YM in 2027. We will be working with YM Agenda Committee and others on how this should be supported, which might entail providing various resources, study guides, webinars etc. The text itself should be accompanied by explanatory material on why the book is as it is, the processes for familiarisation and eventual decision, and proposed arrangements for the separate preparation and authorisation of supplementary material. We envisage that the complete first draft might initially be made available in versions that can be accessed by computer or mobile device, on paper, and to be listened to. Work is in hand on the details of how to achieve this at reasonable cost.
9. We would like YM in 2027 to give BDRC clear guidance on the voice of the book, its accessibility, the balance between core and supplementary material, any gaps needing to be filled or unnecessary material to be removed. We would then hope to work with YM Agenda Committee and others on managing the further consultation and revision process after YM in 2027, leading up to preparation of revised text for preparatory consideration by Friends throughout Britain, and eventual presentation of a complete final text to a YM in 2030 for adoption and publication. At this point we expect the final version

to be available as a website, as a printed book, as a downloadable pdf or ebook, and as an audio version.

How can Friends get involved?

10. You can:

- pray for and uphold the Committee
- look at our webpage at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/rqfp>
- contribute to our online creative project “Open to New Light”
<https://padlet.com/bdrc/OpenToNewLight>
- share ideas for the new book, including telling us of inspirational and helpful pieces of writing. These can be offered using an online form (<https://forms.quaker.org.uk/qfp-idea/>) or by contacting the Committee Secretary by email (qfp@quaker.org.uk) or writing to Friends House

Conclusion

11. As always, we are hugely grateful to our Secretary and other BYM staff for all their work and support for us. We ask Meeting for Sufferings and Friends generally to continue to uphold us.

Rosie Carnall and Catherine Brewer (Co-Clerks), Michael Phipps (Assistant Clerk)

Michael S Booth: Committee Secretary

Other members of the Committee: Tas Cooper, Ben Pink Dandelion, Joycelin Dawes, Lucy Faulkner-Gawlinski, Rhiannon Grant, Jessica Hubbard-Bailey, Catherine James, Pearl Johns, Jennifer Kavanagh, Sally Kikaya, Stevie Krayner, Michael Long, Matt Moore, Rachel Muers, Anya Nanning Ramamurthy, Finola O'Sullivan, Alastair Reid, Antonia Swinson, Judith Thompson, Nuala Watt, Marcie White (formerly Winstanley), Andrew Williams, Mary Woodward.

Annex A

List of main topics for the new Book of Discipline

These are listed below, broadly in the order of starting work on them, and with their provisional titles:

- Discernment
- Meeting for worship for church affairs
- Nominations
- Spiritual and pastoral care
- Concern
- Sharing the Quaker experience (outreach)
- Marriage
- Trusteeship & charitable status
- Community
- Conflict
- Spiritual experience
- Worship
- Testimony
- Service
- Witness
- Personal journey
- Quaker approaches to dying and death;
- Diversity and inclusion
- Close relationships
- Quaker theology
- Quaker meeting structures in Britain
- Stewardship of our resources
- Friends and other churches/faiths
- Quakers and secular bodies;
- World family of Friends/Quakers in the world
- Quaker history;
- Where are we going?
- Introductions to sections
- Advices & queries
- Membership.

Spoken Introduction to Meeting for Sufferings

I'm Rosie Carnall / Catherine Brewer and Michael Phipps online. Are there other member of the committee here?

Being part of the Book of Discipline Revision Committee is a remarkable experience. Being willing to accept the request to work on it until it is done was a good challenge to me personally. It requires a commitment of me that I'm not always sure I can manage. The only way it works is to keep faith at each new step and accept the support, wisdom and love that is manifest in the process. It's a wonderful, challenging experience, full of spirit and growth.

We have spoken previously, repeatedly, about the committee's role being to reflect and describe Quaker process, rather than to instigate and direct. It is vital that Friends understand that – and Catherine will tell you later about how we continue to do this. But another aspect of our work is to look to the future, to intuit how to create a book which will be useful in decades to come. Ours is fast changing world, it can be challenging to look ahead.

Recently, I spent a weekend with a whole lot of other Quakers at the Future of British Quakerism conference considering what our future might look like. In a review of the conference discussions, Rhiannon Grant brought us the image of being on a cliff top and the possibility of using a hang-glider to jump off. This was a rich metaphor for Friends to play with!

Slide 1 - Image 1 – hang-gliding / para-gliding

One aspect of the analogy for me, was to consider the increased use of para-gliding as a way to have the experience of soaring above the earth. Hang-gliders have a rigid structure and are heavier to carry. You need to have more instruction to be able to fly one and they're more expensive. Para-gliders are a simpler, flexible construction, which are more accessible to use. You can have the essential experience of soaring above the earth in a para-glider, but you can't do the aeronautical tricks that are possible in a hang-glider.

As Quakers, we're doing a lot of work on becoming more accessible, developing simpler, more flexible structures. We want people to be able to join us easily, to share our core practice of sitting together in the stillness – our soaring experience.

As a committee, we need to ask ourselves how this new book of discipline can uphold the positive changing future of our lived Quaker faith and practice. How can it be simple, flexible and accessible, while conveying the beauty, challenge, risk and joy of our experience? And we need you to consider this too. What fancy tricks are you willing to relinquish to create a more welcoming and open community of Friends?

Slide 2 - Image 2 – pedalling hard

We are showing an image of someone riding a bicycle, showing the wheels and the gears and the shoes on the pedals. The idea here is ‘pedalling hard’.

We set ourselves a deadline to be ready to share a complete first draft in time for Yearly Meeting 2027. And we are on track for that. But it still feels like a huge task – this doesn’t feel like a downhill stretch, or even a flat. It does feel like a change of gear. Previously we’ve been working on preparing draft content for individual topics, and we’re coming towards the end of that. More and more, our focus is on what needs to be done to pull it all together into something that is useful to share with you.

We need to reassess all the work we’ve done so far. How does it all fit together? Are there gaps? Duplication? Our understanding of the voice of the book – the tone and the language – has developed as we’ve been working. Much of our early work needs to be revisited to make the voice consistent. There is a big editing job to do.

As clerks we were reflecting that any project has cycles of energy. We are past the initial excitement and energy that comes with getting started. We are not yet in the final push to get the project finished. We are in the middle, and it feels our task at the moment involves keeping track of a lot of moving parts, and making sure that we keep the momentum going. It can feel daunting. We ask you to uphold us. We are very grateful for the practical support and advice from our staff and from our consultant Linda Craig, who is helping us think through the details of our plan for this stage of our work.

Slide 3 - Image 3 – tree structure

So, where are we up to? We are showing an image of a tree drawn by a member of our committee. On it are written the themes and topics that we identified to make up the content of the book. We have been using this image of a tree to think about the structure of our book and to group the topics that we have been working on. The trunk is the things that are at the core of the whole: spiritual experience, worship, our Quaker understanding of discernment and testimony. Then we have three main branches, which are, broadly speaking, how our Quaker faith manifests within our Quaker community, in interactions with the wider world, and in our personal lives. The roots are our history, and there are budding ideas about where we are going.

Like a tree, this is not fixed. At our last meeting we reflected on the groupings of topics, and found ourselves moving some from one branch to another. Some of the headings are provisional, particularly in the sections on our personal journey and relationships, where there is a lot of work currently in progress. QF&P currently has chapters on ‘Personal Journey’ and ‘Close Relationships’. These were a starting point for thinking about what this section should cover, but there are different ways we might divide up the material. There may be more changes as we receive the final draft topics and look at how they fit together, and beyond that when we review our work as a whole.

We have drafts complete or in progress for all the topics that are currently identified on our tree, except Membership. We did some initial work on this, but we know the Yearly Meeting has several pieces of work ongoing in this area which could change what we need to say, and we want to see where these will lead to. Another section that we deliberately left to the end is Advices and Queries. At our last meeting we began our work on this by thinking about what Advices and Queries means to us. We have tasked ourselves to do some individual work on how to approach Advices and Queries, and we will pick this up again at our meeting in July.

We still have a lot of questions about the content and structure of the new book, and we know that we won't have answers to all of these before Yearly Meeting 2027. And that is how it should be. What we are expecting to present to you for 2027 is very much a first draft. It will be rough in places. We won't be asking Yearly Meeting to accept this draft; we will be asking you to explore it, talk about it and give us feedback on it. We will need your input to help us shape our further work. When we shared two draft topics with you in 2023, this gave us some helpful feedback on the approach we were taking.

We have thought seriously about whether we should share further draft topics with the whole YM in advance of 2027. But our timeline is tight: to be ready to share a full draft for YM 2027, we really need to finish drafting by the end of 2025. We also think that it will be more helpful to wait until you can see all the topics together. Without that, you would be to some extent working blind. We know that some people who commented on the early draft topics felt constrained by not knowing what might be covered elsewhere in the book.

As a committee we have an idea about how it all fits together, and we think we need to put it all out there so that you can also see the whole. Because the book does not belong to the revision committee, it belongs to you. We see YM 2027 as a key stage in the process of the YM making the book its own. I'm going to pass back to Rosie to talk more about that process.

Slide 4 - Image 4 – a meal together

Friends, this is a collaborative process. We are working away to bring you a draft text. We are counting on you to be doing the work to be ready to receive it. When I cook a meal for friends, I consider their dietary needs and preferences in planning the menu. I do my best to create something tasty that we can all share. Although you might not want to eat everything on the table, I hope you'll find what you need for an enjoyable, sustaining and nutritious meal. In our house, I like to bring all the food to the table and ask people to help themselves from what's available.

I enjoy cooking and eating with friends. It's often struck me how you can spend as long as you like preparing the meal, but it generally gets eaten in more or less the same amount of time.

We're spending a long time preparing this book. We hope you'll enjoy it when it comes to the table. Not every passage will speak to you, but we want everyone in our Quaker community to be able to find what they need to know that they are welcome here, to find the sustenance they need.

As a committee our attention is turning to bringing the draft text together and to preparing to share it with you. You can help us in this by talking with each other about your experience of being Quaker, doing Quaker. Of thinking through what the core of the 'soaring experience' is and what's vital in describing it.

When we bring you the first draft, we want to have collaborative conversations so we can learn from you about how to create the final version that will work for Quakers in Britain in the decades to come.

Slide 5 – Exercise to reflect on A&Q

Catherine mentioned our committee work on Advice and Queries. We started with a simple 'go-round' responding to the question 'What do Advices and Queries mean to you?' and now we're each invited to try writing some – or drawing or collaging or otherwise creating some new ones. You could do that too. It's a fruitful process and encourages rich sharing.

Minute of Meeting for Sufferings

MfS/24/12/09 Revision of the Book of Discipline

We receive a report from the Book of Discipline Revision Committee (BDRC) on its activity for the past year, and the clerks of the committee have spoken to it.

BDRC is under the care of Meeting for Sufferings and we record our deep appreciation for the considerable work they continue to do for the yearly meeting.

We are pleased to see the progress made to create our new book of discipline.

We have been given details of how the committee is working and it is keen to point out that its role is to reflect and describe Quaker practice, rather than to instigate and direct. The committee has shared the steps it intends to take to finish drafting by the end of 2025, so that it can edit the text and produce a complete first draft of the new book before the end of 2026. Friends will be encouraged to read and discuss the first draft, in preparation for it coming to a Yearly Meeting session in 2027. We understand that after careful consideration, the committee has decided not to seek feedback on sample draft text, in the interim period. Instead, it invites Friends to engage with BDRC work. The committee aims to bring the complete and final text to a session of Yearly Meeting in 2030, for adoption.

The report includes ways to support and uphold the committee and get involved in its work. We encourage members of Meeting of Sufferings to share this with Friends in their meetings, and encourage them to engage with the work of BDRC. The group has also provided us with a copy of their exercise 'Reflecting on Advices and Queries', which we and our meetings might like to try.

We thank Rosie Carnall, Catherine Brewer and Michael Phipps for the report, and Rosie and Catherine for presenting it and answering our questions.

Activity: Reflecting on Advices and Queries

Book of Discipline Revision Committee – reflecting on Advices & Queries

“What do Advices & Queries mean to you?”

Use this as the prompt for a go-round, giving each person the opportunity to share some thoughts. A listening circle, not discussion!

Then take some time to write, draw, collage or otherwise create some new advices and queries. This could be as a group or an individual activity.

You might want to think about:

- What you want to keep from the current ones
- What's missing that you want to include
- How you create something clear and simple, flexible and welcoming

Spend time sharing your work with each other. Use this as an opportunity to “Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal.” (A&Q 18).