



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

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

Third report to Meeting for Sufferings

December 2022

Introduction

1. Following Minute 31 of Yearly Meeting 2018, Meeting for Sufferings established the Book of Discipline Revision Committee with Terms of Reference approved in July 2018, to bring to Yearly Meeting draft text for adoption as BYM's book of discipline, together with proposals for its publication. The appointment of our initial membership of 24, including two co-clerks and an assistant clerk, was completed by February 2019 and we first met in May 2019. This is our third progress report, following those in 2020 and 2021.

Who we are

2. We are a diverse committee reflecting the breadth of Britain Yearly Meeting, as required by our Terms of Reference. Since our last report in December 2021, 3 of our members have been released at their request or on completion of their term of service, and 2 new members have been appointed. One of our members temporarily stepped back from the work on maternity leave, and has now returned. Of our current 24:

- geographically, 21% live in Scotland and Wales; and of the remaining 79% living in England, broadly equal proportions are in northern, central and southern areas
- three-quarters are female
- our ages range from 20s to over 70
- the lengths and nature of our Quaker backgrounds vary just as widely, as do our life and employment experiences
- several of us face particular challenges, which reminds us all of our role in enabling everyone to take part fully.

Our work so far

3. We have now met as a full committee 15 times. The first five were residential weekends face-to-face; then eight were held virtually by part-weekend zoom videoconferences during the coronavirus pandemic and its aftermath; and then two residentially face-to-face again by special permission in the second half of 2022 to enable us to work intensively together in reviewing where we have got to and planning the remaining phases of our task in detail. We have also continued to work hard individually and in various subgroups on specific topics, and held regular check-in zoom committee meetings to keep track of these.

4. Our **previous reports** described our steps to

- learn **how best to work together** as a cohesive committee
- document a set of principles for our **committee processes** and **developing content**
- develop a working understanding of the **purpose of the book of discipline**
- identify a range of different **audiences** for it, their expectations of it and how they might use it
- articulate seven key **interlinked common themes** that will need to be reflected in it, and five **key insights describing the unity of our Quaker way** which will run as threads through it
- clarify that the “**book**” **will need to appear in a variety of formats and platforms**
- test the distinction between “**core**” material in the book (what Quakers do and why – the spiritual basis) and “**supplementary**” (detail on how we do it – to be published separately)
- **engage with Friends generally** to encourage interest in our work, through activities with Woodbrooke; leading sessions at Yearly Meeting, area meetings and other gatherings; setting up an online creative project; publishing “Frequently Asked Questions” and key messages; and having a presence on social media.

5. **By the end of 2022**, we will have

- with the help of an external consultant, developed a detailed **project plan and timescale** for completing our task by the end of this decade, which we have discussed with the clerks of Yearly Meeting (see paragraph 6 below)
- reviewed and amplified our **list of (now 28) main topics** to be covered in the new book
- prepared substantive **first drafts on 7 of these: discernment, meeting for worship for church affairs, nominations, community, sharing the Quaker experience (outreach), marriage, and trusteeship & charitable status (incorporating elements of resources/stewardship)**
- set up groups to prepare **first drafts on 5 more: testimony, spiritual experience/Quaker theology/spiritual diversity, worship, membership, conflict**

- continued over-arching work to **review all these drafts for consistency, coherence, accessibility, and choices of language and voice** to reflect inclusivity and Quaker spiritual experience; and **to compile a glossary**
- developed principles for our choice of **language to express spiritual concepts and experience**, and for the **use of quotations and extracts**
- prepared on request a paper on our understanding of the **Quaker theological underpinning of our constitutional structures**, which we have sent to Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations and to the groups reviewing Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings and other aspects of our structures to help them with their work, and which will inform our future drafting of text on these topics; we have received some helpful comments from QCCIR which we will take forward with them
- continued to identify **areas which may need discernment by yearly meeting structures** before we can produce definitive content for adoption
- started using a system for **tagging contributions and comments received from Friends** across the yearly meeting, so that these can be considered when drafting relevant text.

Our timetable

6. Our project plan entails **finishing writing all the topics and sequencing and editing the material between 2023 and 2026** - we need this amount of time for the scale of that task! During that period we may need to test some further sample texts with Friends more widely, or bring specific issues to Meeting for Sufferings or Yearly Meeting for discernment so that we can produce definitive content. We then envisage bringing a **first fairly complete draft of the whole book via Meeting for Sufferings to Yearly Meeting 2027** for initial consideration. This would be followed by extensive consultation among Friends and meetings throughout Britain on the draft. In the light of that, we may then need to do some redrafting or additional writing. We aim to produce a **near-final draft by Yearly Meeting 2029**, followed by further consultation among Friends and meetings. We hope this would lead to a **final text to be presented to Yearly Meeting 2030 for adoption**.

Our next steps

7. During the year ahead, we hope to
- ❖ **share sample texts on marriage and on nominations** with Meeting for Sufferings, and through MfS representatives with area meetings and other Friends (see paragraph 8 below)
 - ❖ start drafting **text on the remaining main topics** not yet covered
 - ❖ continue to **review drafts for consistency, coherence, accessibility, language and voice**
 - ❖ consider how and when to consult expert Friends, central and other standing committees on **issues arising** as this work progresses; how and when to come back to

Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting on major matters of principle requiring further corporate discernment before drafting can be completed

- ❖ bring together **the shape of the whole book**, how the topics fit together and flow while enabling the reader to find answers to questions
- ❖ monitor our **progress against our project plan and timescale** to keep on track
- ❖ accept more **invitations from area meetings and others**, by zoom or otherwise, so far as our people resources allow, and find other ways of **engaging Friends** throughout the yearly meeting.

Sharing sample texts

8. We are excited by the forthcoming first opportunity to **share sample texts on marriage and on nominations**. We want to use this to test our approach to the voice of the book, language and style and accessibility, and the balance between core and supplementary material. Your feedback will help us to shape our drafting of the rest of the book. We are not asking at this stage for detailed drafting comments on these particular texts. The process for sharing text will begin with circulating the two sample texts (together with an explanatory covering paper including specific questions and a form for sending responses) to Meeting for Sufferings members after the 3 December 2022 meeting. Over the following two months we will arrange online opportunities for preparing for discussion of our questions about the texts and for answering queries. We encourage you to share the texts and questions with your area meetings and others, and to send responses to us. We envisage reporting back to Meeting for Sufferings in March 2023 on what we have learned from the sharing and how we might take things forward, in the light of discernment and guidance from the Meeting.

How can Friends get involved?

9. You can:

- pray for and uphold the Committee
- respond constructively to the sample texts we will be sharing with you
- look at our webpage at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/resources/quaker-faith-and-practice/revising-quaker-faith-practice>
- 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* or writing to Friends House
- engage with our social media accounts via Revising Quaker faith & practice pages on
 - facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/revisingqfp/>
 - instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/revisingqfp>

- twitter – <https://www.twitter.com/revisingqfp>
- invite us to talk with your meeting about our work (subject to our availability).

Conclusion

10. As always, we are hugely grateful to our Secretary and other BYM staff for all their work and support for us.

11. Now that we have been able to meet in person again for the first time in over two years, and our project plan and timescale are becoming clearer, we feel a renewed sense of energy. While the tasks ahead still challenge us, we know we can approach them boldly, joyfully, prayerfully and creatively. We ask Meeting for Sufferings and Friends generally to continue to uphold us.

Rosie Carnall, Catherine Brewer, Michael Phipps: Co-Clerks and Assistant Clerk
Michael Booth: Committee Secretary

*The dedicated email address for our work is qfp@quaker.org.uk

The spoken introduction to the report.

(What was actually said may have differed slightly in places).

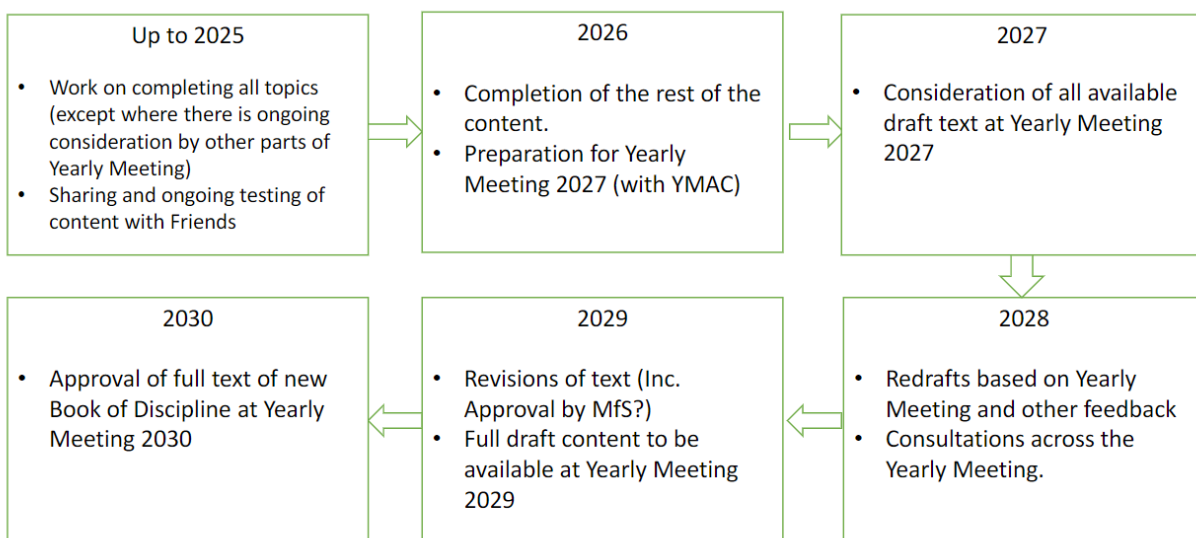
The spoken introduction was given by the co-clerks: Catherine Brewer and Rosie Carnall.

Catherine Brewer – timetable for our work

Since we last reported to you we have been able to make progress with defining the timetable for our work. This feels like a significant development! We were getting close to this three years ago, and then the pandemic hit. For a while everything felt up in the air and we just had to keep going and make progress as we were able. But we knew that we needed to come back to this and give you an answer to the question of ‘how long is this going to take’?

We have been very grateful for the support we have to do this. We asked for a consultant to help us, and Linda Craig was appointed. She has been tremendously helpful to us in clarifying the process we want to follow and the steps that we need in our plan. We also greatly appreciated being given permission to meet in person twice this year. It felt like this was essential for us to do the work we needed to discern and agree the timetable.

Book of Discipline Revision Committee Flowchart



So for the next four years or so, we will be working on drafting content for all the topics we’ve identified. This will be to bring a more or less complete draft to (hopefully) a Yearly Meeting Gathering. Then there will be an editing and revision process, before bringing a final draft to YM, and we hope that will be in 2030. You might be thinking that this sounds like a long time. But there are a few things to bear in mind.

One is the scale of the task. We realised almost immediately that to revise the book of discipline in the way that Yearly Meeting asked of us required a far more fundamental revision than simply editing what is already there. We were asked to draw out the core principles of what we do and why, to separate core and supplementary material, and to think beyond the

confines of a printed book. We therefore made the decision to start with a clean slate in terms of the structure of the book, and the content for the church government sections. The structure is still emerging. So when we are talking about topics, these are areas of content that we have identified need to be covered in the book. We are not yet thinking about them in terms of chapters, and our understanding of the boundaries between topics evolves as we work on them. Some topics are likely to group together, while large topics may need to be broken down into separate sections.

There was a question in the preparatory sessions about alternative formats for the book. This is still an open question for us, but something we are actively thinking about. We are dipping our toe into the water by providing an audio version of the draft texts. There was also a question about a review of membership. It is important to say that our task is to reflect the position of the YM, and not to review or make changes to processes. However, there are topics on which we may need to ask the Yearly Meeting to clarify the position and this is something else we have had in mind in when thinking about our timetable.

Another thing to bear in mind is that we are not going to wait until 2027 to share draft content with you. It is important to us that the process we are going through involves you, and is not just our committee working in isolation. So we also need to build that into the timeline. There are the two occasions when we expect full drafts to come to Yearly Meeting, and we are talking to Yearly Meeting clerks about timing and process. However, to get us to the point of having a full draft ready to share, we expect that we will want your feedback on some of the components along the way. We are starting this process of sharing now, and Rosie is going to talk more about that shortly.

It is also important to say that we do not expect that the content we are sharing with you now will look the same when it forms part of the complete draft. We will be working on the individual topics we have identified, and then we will need to look at them all together. We expect that there will be a substantial editing process once we understand how they are going to fit together. We are also thinking carefully about the language and style that is right for our book of discipline today. We want to test out our ideas about this, and that is a key point that we will be looking for feedback on in the initial sharing process.

So there is still a lot of work that we have to do, and that means that the timetable that we have set actually feels challenging. It will be very helpful to us to have the plan to work to, but it is still new to us. So over the next year I think there will be a bit of testing to make sure that it is realistic. We have some good building blocks in place now: we have writing guidelines that committee members can work to, and we have a process for setting up topic groups and determining when their content is 'good enough for now'. So I would say that I am cautiously optimistic that this timescale is achievable.

I am now going to hand over to Rosie to tell you more about the process of sharing text and how you can help us in this next stage of our work.

Rosie Carnall – sharing text

It's tempting to think about how long this process might take in relation to how long it took last time. And in some ways that's fair enough. But of course, it is also a very different process we're undertaking, because the world is different now.

When we were first appointed to this committee, we were given a folder of papers from last time – papers about their process and letters from some members of the previous committee. Some of those papers and letters, from towards the end of their process, had been written *on a computer*. It's certainly a different world technology-wise now, and one of the significant differences that means for our process is in how we can invite you all in earlier.

We are about to share two draft texts with you. These cover two topics: Marriage and Nominations. Since our last meeting in October, we've been able to record audio versions of those texts to share with you. And in the new year, we're going to be able to hold online meetings with you – MfS reps – to say more about how we hope Friends will read, listen and respond to these texts. All of these things are possible because of the technology that is available to us.

However, technology cannot (yet) write the texts for us and as Catherine said, we have engaged our human heads, hearts and spirits in working out what and how we are writing. We feel we are ready to share these drafts with you. We hope we are. We feel a bit trepidatious!

We've got drafts of seven topics so far and so I'm going to say a bit more about why we decided which to share with you:

- We wanted to share two topics so that attention wouldn't be too focused on the specific content of any one topic – this process is about how we are approaching the task
- We thought it would be useful to share one topic – Marriage – that's close to an existing chapter – to give a sense of how relatively familiar content might feel different
- We thought it would also be useful to share one topic – Nominations – that doesn't currently have its own its own chapter – to give a sense of how starting from topics rather than the existing structure might feel different
- We aimed to choose topics which are reasonably accessible – we want this to be an inclusive process that newer Quakers can join in with, as well as seasoned Friends
- We needed to feel confident that the texts are ready for sharing – especially given that we don't especially want you to focus on making detailed edits on the texts themselves
 - o What we are really interested in is how the texts land with you and what you feel about the way they are written – the tone of the writing or the 'voice of the book'
 - o Both texts include some anthology material and we'd be glad to know whether you think the balance is right but it's also worth saying that what's included may change – we've only just started on topics that include more anthology content.
 - o We would like to know your suggestions for what you would expect to find in supplementary materials. As Catherine outlined, we were asked that new book should have 'core' and 'supplementary' elements. We are focussing on writing the core text – that reflects the essential elements of how we 'be Quaker and do Quaker'. We are keeping a note of what we think will be needed in the supplementary material – which will include further practical guidance that may

change, in the way it has for marriage, including handbooks and guidelines and legal information – but your input on what you think will be needed will be very welcome

- Finally, crucially, we need to know whether you think the content of the drafts describes the core of our Quaker way effectively – and whether it feels inclusive to you and to all the other Friends in your meeting.
- This is our book, for our whole community.

We're aware that there are tender issues to be addressed, particularly around the question of how we describe our experience of the divine. We don't expect everyone to agree about how we have chosen to approach this. But we do hope that everyone can be involved in conversations to discuss these questions and participate in discernment to reflect on the way forward. Please talk to each other and tell us about what you find out.

Book of Discipline Revision Committee Process for sharing draft text

- **December 2022 Meeting for Sufferings** – BDRC 3rd report and an outline explanation of the process for responding to draft text
- **December 2022 Meeting for Sufferings follow up papers** – includes two draft topics with a coversheet that outlines what we are asking Friends to do, including some questions to respond to
- **January / February 2023** – BDRC facilitate an online session (x3) for Meeting for Sufferings reps/alternates provides the opportunity to ask further questions and some ideas for engaging Friends in discussion about the draft texts
- **March 2023 Meeting for Sufferings** – agenda time to reflect and discern on questions we've asked, not to reach a decision, but as part of the feedback process
- **Yearly Meeting 2023** – special interest group offer from BDRC will focus on the draft texts
- **End of May 2023** – the feedback process for these draft texts closes
- **July 2023** – BDRC meet (in person) and reflect on everything we have learned from this process!

Thank you for coming on this part of the journey with us. As I said earlier, we are trepidatious, and we are looking forward to hearing what and how you will respond. By sharing text with you, Meeting for Sufferings, we hope to reach all the Area Meetings, that is we hope to reach Quakers in Britain. We're interested to hear from individuals, but it will be even more valuable to us if you are able to reflect and discern together.

We're asking you to read, listen and reflect. What do you find through reading or listening to these texts and how would you like them to be different in content and tone? We do hope you can resist detailed editing – difficult I know – but we really want to know more about how you feel about the drafts we've written, and what would make them more effective in describing the core of our Quaker way.

There is a coversheet provided with the texts which outlines the questions we're asking you to consider and provides a link to the online form provided for submitting your responses. We are also providing an online session for MfS reps – repeated on 3 dates in January and February – which will be an opportunity for you to ask more questions about the feedback process and we'll have some more suggestions about ways to engage Friends with the shared texts. Then, we're going to be coming back to meet with you at MfS in March, when we'll have some agenda time for shared discernment.

However, the feedback process is open to the end of May. We hope this will give many meetings time to engage in a shared process of reading and response. We'll also be offering sessions at Yearly Meeting which will be open to all. As a committee we'll be reflecting on everything we learn in the process at our meeting in July 2023.

We want to hear from you, we want to know what you think of how we're approaching our task.

Meeting for Sufferings minute

Held at Friends House and by video conference on 3 December 2022

MfS/22/12/09 Revising our book of discipline

We receive a report from the Book of Discipline Revision Committee (MfS 2022 12 12). It reminds us that this Committee is under our care and their report updates us on the monumental task that they are diligently taking forward. We are truly grateful for the Committee's work and continue to uphold them in their task.

We have heard from the Committee's clerks, Rosie Carnall and Catherine Brewer, about its work over the past year, its plans for the year ahead, and the joy of working on this emergent and developing process.

The Committee has now set a timetable for completing the revision and this has been shared with us today.

We have been invited to comment on sample text for marriage and nominations which will be distributed after this meeting. We share the Committee's excitement and encourage members of Sufferings to consider the text with Friends in area meetings and elsewhere and to respond. We note the Committee is interested in hearing views on the voice of the book, language, style, accessibility, and the balance between core and supplementary material, rather than comments on finer details of the content.

We note that the Committee hopes to report back to us in March next year on what they learn from this exercise.

Margaret Bryan, Clerk