# Book of Discipline Revision Committee: Frequently asked questions

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## General

### Why are you revising Quaker faith & practice?

We revise our book of discipline roughly once a generation. As Quakers, we believe in ongoing revelation from God. When we are faithful to ‘the promptings of love and truth’, we can gain new insights, and new understanding of the insights of those who have gone before us in this journey. New matters arise – for example climate change – about which we have said little in the present book.

### When was the last revision done?

It was begun in 1986 and completed in 1994 when Yearly Meeting in session approved it.

## The book itself

### What is the difference between the book of discipline and Quaker faith & practice?

Our yearly meeting always has a book of discipline – a book which tells us what Quakers should do, how, and sometimes why, and gives examples. At different times this book has had different titles. Our current book of discipline in Britain Yearly Meeting is called *Quaker faith & practice*.

### Will the new book be called *Quaker faith & practice*?

That will be decided when we are close to completing our work.

### Will the whole book be revised?

We are looking at the whole book, but expect to be using parts of the present book in our revision.

### Are you preparing the 6th edition of *Quaker faith & practice*?

We are creating a book to replace *Quaker faith & practice*; we are not just revising the current 5th edition.

### I really want us to return to two volumes.

At the moment the Book of Discipline Revision Committee are exploring lots of options. We think that the ‘new book’ might not be just a book, but have some parts online and some parts printed for use in meetings. It might not all be printable – for example, it might include videos. It is also intended that some of the detail in the current book, such as advice for role holders, will be included in supplementary material and will no longer be part of the core text.

### Can you explain what is meant about core and supplementary content?

The Book of Discipline Preparation Group recommended a separation between ’core’ and ‘supplementary’ material as a new way of approaching the church government material in *Quaker faith & practice*. Core material would form the primary content of the new book, and would focus on the principles that inform our practice (why we do what we do) as well as extracts describing Quaker experience. Supplementary material would consist of detailed advice and guidance on how we do things; this is likely to be in separate publications and to be more frequently updated. Yearly Meeting in 2018 accepted this recommendation and asked the Book of Discipline Revision Committee to separate material in this way.

### Who will decide how supplementary content is updated?

Part of the task of the Book of Discipline Revision Committee is to make suggestions about how the supplementary content is kept up to date. It is likely that different parts of the supplementary material will be kept up to date in different ways.

### How long will the finished book be?

We don’t know yet. It may not even be (just) a book.

### I have heard that the book will only be available online or electronically.

No decision has been made about the format of the next book. However, we know that there are many situations where a printed version will be helpful – including on meeting house tables and in libraries.

### What colour will the new book be?

Probably not red, to show that it is different from the one we have now.

### When will the new book be ready?

Eventually, God willing! The last revision was started by Yearly Meeting in 1985 and the text agreed in 1994. The revision committee started its task in 1986 and the draft text was shared with Friends in late 1993.

## Content of the new book

### How much have you written?

We haven’t yet agreed any final text. At the moment we are experimenting with working methods and rough drafts. Please uphold us while we undertake this hard work.

### Will it continue in the anthology format?

We expect that the book will continue to contain anthology material, as we see this as an important way that the book can reflect the diverse experience of our Quaker community. We don’t yet know exactly how the book will be structured, and we are experimenting with different formats and writing styles. Our aim is to create something which is widely accessible and expresses the most important parts of the Quaker way, including our spirituality, history, and diversity.

### Parts of Quaker faith & practice are written in complicated language. Will you make it simpler? What about the historic pieces from early Friends?

We are hoping to make the sections on church government readable for many more people. When there is a quotation from someone else’s writing, we accept their language. We are considering the question of whether some of the earliest writings of Friends need either a gloss, an explanation or some re-writing.

### Will God be mentioned in the new book?

Yes. Many Quaker writings throughout history talk about God using that word, and others like Spirit, Light, Love, Truth, and Christ. We expect those traditions to be well represented. We also expect that other ways British Quakers talk about spirituality will be included. We know that Quakers today express their spiritual experiences, and lack of them, in multiple ways.

### What parts of the current book count as church government?

Looking at *Quaker faith & practice*, broadly chapters 3­–17 would count as the church government sections.

### What changes will the committee be making to the church government section?

The text of church government should reflect the decisions and discernment of the yearly meeting. Even now, the text follows the discernment and decisions, rather than being a way of changing our practice. However, we are expecting to substantially rewrite these sections, so that the core text focuses on principles and makes clear the spiritual underpinnings of our practice, in a way that is more accessible to everyone in our Quaker community.

### Will you include extracts about topics that have been missed from the current book?

That depends why they are absent from the current book. Some topics may not be relevant to Quakers as a community, even if they are very important to some individual Quakers. Other topics do not have an agreed Quaker position, even when the questions have been widely considered by Quakers. For some topics we may simply have nothing to say. We hope that by explaining Quaker thinking and decision-making, the new book will help Quakers to reach their own answers on topics which are not covered. We hope that the book will give guidance to Friends about a way to explore and establish how to approach a new challenge or situation. We don’t know what the future will bring, but we can help Friends have the spiritual tools and confidence to approach it.

### What about aspects that are missing from the present book?

Calling them ‘missing’ is an assumption that we need everything in the same book. We are working on another assumption at present – that there will be core material in the book itself, and supplementary material to give us day-to-day working material which might change as, for example, if the law about data protection changes again.

What will you do about topics where Britain Yearly Meeting needs to make or update a decision?

We will refer all such matters to Meeting for Sufferings who will make the decision of where to refer them to.

### Will you include extracts from non-Quaker writings?

The matter is being considered. No decision has been made.

### Will the new book contain extracts which are art, poetry, music, or other items and not just written words?

We hope that this will be so.

### Will it be easy to find our way around the new book?

We are exploring the questions of sections/chapters/themes, of indexing and of creating pathways through the book. However, the last two will have to wait until we have a book to index!

## The committee

### Who is on the committee?

The committee currently has 22 members, who broadly reflect our Yearly Meeting in terms of age, location and life experience. The work of the committee is supported by BYM staff.

### How many people are on the committee, how were you appointed and how often do you meet?

We can have up to 28 people on the committee, nominated by Central Nominations Committee, and appointed by Meeting for Sufferings on their recommendation. Originally 24 Friends were appointed.

### What is the committee doing?

We have been working on coming to an understanding of the broad sweep of the new book, and experimenting with different ways of working, as individuals, as small groups and as a whole group. We want to take time for the Spirit to work amongst us, so that our work reflects our ongoing commitment to ‘the promptings of love and truth in our hearts’.

### How is the committee going to consult with Friends?

We send out our key messages after each meeting, and use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. There is feedback on the BYM website. Our key messages often appear in *Quaker News*. We have held a conference open to all Friends at Woodbrooke in 2019 and might in the future hold another. We will use opportunities at events like Yearly Meeting Gathering to share our progress and listen to Friends telling us of their ideas for the new book. Committee members, when invited, report back to their area meeting, and can be invited by nearby area meetings too. Bodies such as General Meeting for Scotland and Meeting of Friends in Wales ask for feedback from the committee and discuss what they hear. We hope to be pro-active in listening to our fellow Quakers.

### Will a member of the committee come and talk to my area meeting? Or my Quaker group?

Get in touch with Michael Booth, committee secretary, by email [michaelsb@quaker.org.uk](mailto:michaelsb@quaker.org.uk) or [qfp@quaker.org.uk](mailto:qfp@quaker.org.uk) to see if there is someone available to come and talk. At the moment, it is very early in the process, but we are still willing to come if we can.

## Getting involved in the revision process

### How can I find out what’s going on with the revision process?

There are reports on Facebook, Twitter and the BYM website. Key messages are in *Quaker News*. Talk to a committee member.

### How can I get involved with the revision process?

At Yearly Meeting Gathering there will be many opportunities for you to hear about our progress and to tell us your ideas for the new Book of Discipline. We hope you will come to one of our group sessions if you are there. We will be holding one about ‘My favourite pieces in *Quaker faith & practice*’ so that you can tell us what you would like us to keep from the present book. There is also a link on the BYM website where you can submit pieces for consideration by the committee. When we are further on in our work, we will need to involve others as the revision is a huge task. Express an interest in doing this at Yearly Meeting Gathering if you would like to help. Also, we will need new committee members as people find themselves called elsewhere. Let Central Nominations committee know you are interested in contributing. The names of all those who originally expressed an interest have been carefully kept, and will be considered as new tasks emerge or vacancies occur.

### How do I submit material for consideration?

You can submit through the collection tool: [Qfp idea](https://forms.quaker.org.uk/qfp-idea/)

### What is the closing date for suggestions?

We have not set a closing date, as we have years of work ahead of us. But get your suggestions in as soon as possible, so that they are there, ready, when we are looking for pieces about a particular topic.

### Why are so many questions asked about copyright?

Authors earn money from selling books. Copyright law protects authors from having other people republish their own original work without permission. Some authors ask for payment if another wishes to quote them. Happily, many Quakers give permission free of charge for their words to be quoted in other Quaker publications.

### I couldn’t get to Woodbrooke for the November 2019 conference, will you be holding another one?

We have not yet decided on this matter but we are keeping this in mind. It depends on Woodbrooke’s timetable and availability, and on whether enough Friends would be interested, to make it worthwhile to repeat such an occasion. The revision will be a long, slow, careful process, so there is time to consider all options.

## Any Other Questions

If you have a question about the revision process that isn’t answered here, then please Get in touch with Michael Booth, committee secretary, by email [michaelsb@quaker.org.uk](mailto:michaelsb@quaker.org.uk) or [qfp@quaker.org.uk](mailto:qfp@quaker.org.uk).

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