



Frequently Asked Questions: Continuing Yearly Meeting

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What is meant by a 'continuing Yearly Meeting'?

A continuing Yearly Meeting is where Yearly Meeting meets in full session more than once per year. In our case, these full sessions will happen four times per year – one longer one (e.g. over a long weekend) and three shorter ones (e.g. for a full day on a Saturday).

This means that the business of the Yearly Meeting can continue throughout the year. If a business item at one session needs more time, it can be put back onto the agenda for a future session.

All sessions of Yearly Meeting will be open to any Friend who wishes to attend. There will be programmes for children and young people at each session.

Area meetings, General Meeting for Scotland, Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales, Young Friends General Meeting and some other Quaker bodies will be asked to appoint representatives to Yearly Meeting sessions. An important role of those representatives will be to ensure that other Friends from their meetings who were not present at Yearly Meeting find out what happened and know how to stay involved.

There will still be residential Yearly Meetings from time to time and some Yearly Meeting sessions will be held outside London.

In a nutshell, what will change as a result of the decision to move to a continuing Yearly Meeting?

The major change for Yearly Meeting itself is that it will meet more frequently. In other respects it may feel quite similar to how things are now – the same sorts of business will come to Yearly Meeting and at the longer sessions we expect there will be the same sort of mix of business, worship and community activities that we have now.

A significant change is that Meeting for Sufferings will not continue in its present form. Once Yearly Meeting is held more frequently then we will not need to ask a representative meeting to take care of important business between Yearly Meeting sessions.

In practice, we might find that the one-day sessions of Yearly Meeting look and feel a bit like sessions of Meeting for Sufferings do now. But there will be some very important differences: the sessions will be open to all and the meeting will have all the powers it needs to make any decisions that are appropriate (at the moment, Meeting for Sufferings has some powers delegated to it by Yearly Meeting but the two meetings do not have equal authority).

We expect that BYM trustees will report to Yearly Meeting each time it meets. That will give all Friends more frequent chances to hear what the trustees have been doing and to make suggestions for the future. The roles and responsibilities of BYM trustees will not change.

Will people come to all these meetings?

Friends who are not appointed as representatives will be able to come to all Yearly Meetings and we hope that there will be Friends who come to most or all of the meetings each year. There will be the option to attend online as there is now.

We expect that some items of business will be on the agenda at one meeting and then will come back later in the year. It will be helpful to have Friends there who can follow that business through from one meeting to the next, and we think that some Friends will appreciate that opportunity.

Children and young people will also be able to attend four Yearly Meetings per year and we have already heard enthusiasm from some of them about this.

Some Friends will not be able to attend every Yearly Meeting. We know that even now only a relatively small percentage of Quakers in Britain attend Yearly Meeting. It would be brilliant if more Friends felt able to attend the continuing sessions, but we do not expect everyone to be there (in the venue or online) every time in the future. [Quaker faith & practice paragraph 3.09](#) explicitly acknowledges that no-one is expected to attend every business meeting.

Those Friends appointed as representatives would be expected to attend all four sessions each year. This frequency of meetings is in line with what is currently expected of representatives to Meeting for Sufferings (MfS).

We know that some Friends worry that holding more Yearly Meeting sessions might actually reduce attendance overall, maybe because each session might feel less special and therefore less worth the effort of attending. That is a possibility, but we need to ensure that all Friends know that their presence is welcome and encouraged.

Overall, it feels important that there will be more opportunities for Friends to engage with one another and with the important business of our Religious Society. We can't know for sure at this stage how well attended the sessions will be, but we should do what we can now to encourage Friends to come whenever they can. We can also remind Friends who do not attend that they are welcome to engage with the preparation materials and that they can uphold the meeting from afar.

When will these changes happen?

The first continuing Yearly Meeting sessions will happen after May 2026. There are Yearly Meeting sessions already called for 23-26 May 2025 and 1-4 May 2026 and these will go ahead. Dates after May 2026 haven't been set yet but we expect that on 4 May 2026, Yearly Meeting will be adjourned to a date in summer 2026.

Meeting for Sufferings will continue to meet until spring 2026 and you can find the dates for those meetings on the [Meeting for Sufferings page on the Quaker website](#).

In the meantime, work is starting on terms of reference for an agenda committee for the continuing Yearly Meeting so that Central Nominations Committee can start the process of finding Friends to serve. Meeting for Sufferings will be kept informed over the coming months and will help to shape the process. Further business relating to the implementation of a continuing Yearly Meeting will be brought to Yearly Meeting 2025.

Who will be able to send representatives to YM?

All those meetings and bodies currently represented on Meeting for Sufferings will be able to send representatives to continuing Yearly Meeting sessions. All area meetings, together with General Meeting for Scotland, Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales, Young Friends General Meeting and all our central and standing committees will be asked and encouraged to appoint representatives to Yearly Meeting.

At Yearly Meeting 2024 we heard an interest in widening representation to include Quaker Recognised Bodies and possibly other Quaker communities. Since continuing Yearly Meeting sessions will be open to all Friends, any group that wishes to appoint a Friend to attend as their representative will be free to do so. However, one of the issues that Yearly Meeting 2024 has asked Britain Yearly Meeting trustees to consider is how financial support for representation might work. At this point we do not know whether resources can be made available to support the attendance of representatives from a wider range of groups. BYM trustees are expecting to report to Meeting for Sufferings on these financial issues in the coming months and we will know more after that.

And how will it work having representatives as well as other Friends at Yearly Meeting?

At present, Meeting for Sufferings is a body composed entirely of representatives. The continuing Yearly Meeting sessions will involve representatives and also Friends who have chosen to attend. Having a mix of representatives and others will not be new or unique to Yearly Meeting. Some local meetings still appoint representatives to area meetings, while making it clear that other members will attend as well. Young Friends General Meeting includes but is not limited to Friends who have been appointed as representatives of local and area meetings.

When one Quaker meeting appoints a representative to attend another Quaker meeting it is not appointing a delegate to pass on the views of those they are representing. When we enter a meeting for worship for business any of us attending may feel called to minister from our own experience. We cannot speak on the basis that we are there to champion the viewpoint of another person or body of Friends because Quaker discernment doesn't work like that. In a meeting for worship for business we listen for the spirit and join with others to discern the right way forward. Sometimes it may be relevant to share the discernment of our home meeting. When we do that, we don't present that discernment as though it is right for everyone.

Instead, we make a contribution that we trust will help the whole meeting now gathered to be rightly led.

The new agenda committee, when appointed, will consider whether there is useful guidance to offer to area meetings and others about appointing representatives to continuing Yearly Meeting sessions. For now, it seems that there could be some key roles for representatives:

- Faithfulness in attending – ensuring that there is a degree of continuity if many non-representatives cannot commit to attending all or most sessions.
- Communication – ensuring that Friends in local and area meetings can find out easily what goes on at Yearly Meeting.
- Encouragement – helping Friends who are unsure about attending Yearly Meeting and helping the whole meeting to engage with the Yearly Meeting's business, even if they aren't going to attend.
- Knowledge & experience – representatives of committees and other Quaker bodies may bring particular knowledge and experience that could help the Yearly Meeting with certain business items.

What is happening about financial support for attending Yearly Meeting?

In minute 37 of Yearly Meeting 2024 we asked BYM trustees to do three things to help prepare for a continuing Yearly Meeting:

- Ensure that sufficient financial resources are always available to enable the continuing Yearly Meeting to be held – this will involve making sure that the budget makes appropriate provision for the costs of holding continuing Yearly Meeting sessions.
- Ensure that the current bursary scheme for individuals attending Yearly Meeting is reviewed and ideally simplified. Over the years there has been feedback that the current system is confusing and needs revision.
- Propose a system for supporting area meetings and other bodies with the financial costs of representatives' attendance at Yearly Meeting sessions. BYM trustees will report on this at Meeting for Sufferings in March 2025.

Friends or meetings who want to share their ideas on financial support with BYM trustees can email them on rco@quaker.org.uk.

How will area meetings be able to share their minutes once Meeting for Sufferings is laid down?

When Meeting for Sufferings is laid down, area meeting minutes will be sent to the Yearly Meeting's agenda committee. In many cases the minutes received will need some further seasoning and testing before they can be the subject of fruitful discernment by the whole Yearly Meeting in session.

At present, staff work with the Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group to help prepare the business relating to the minutes that are received. This preparation may include personal contact with members of the area meeting concerned (e.g. to get a fuller sense of the background to the issue), or with staff and committees already working on the matters raised by the minutes (e.g. to get a sense of what is possible), or with bodies outside our BYM structures that are known to have knowledge and expertise in the subject (e.g. to check if concerned meetings could usefully be told about work being done elsewhere). It is likely that a similar type of preparation will be needed when minutes come in to agenda committee instead.

We will need to agree a process that maintains transparency about what is happening, is effective in preparing the business, and does not impose too much work on a committee that will have other functions. In minute 37 of Yearly Meeting 2024 we asked the new agenda committee (which we expect to appoint in May 2025) to work with the clerks of Meeting for Sufferings and others to propose an appropriate process. Agenda committee will report on this and other matters at Yearly Meeting in May 2026.

If Friends have ideas about how minutes from area meetings and other bodies could best be seasoned, they can send them to rco@quaker.org.uk.

What about when concerns come to Yearly Meeting – how will they be tested?

Not all minutes sent in by area meetings relate to concerns, but many do. The answer above gives some ideas about the practical steps that may be needed to prepare minutes (including minutes of concern) for discernment by Yearly Meeting.

When a minute of concern needs to be tested by Yearly Meeting in session then agenda committee will make time on the agenda for that to happen. You can read more about Quaker concerns, including the process for testing them, in [*Quaker faith & practice paragraphs 13.02 to 13.07*](#)

Our ways of approaching Quaker concerns will not change as a result of the move to a continuing Yearly Meeting. Where an individual Friend senses that they have a concern, they will need to spend time in contemplation or prayer, working out whether they are truly being led by the spirit to take some kind of action. If they conclude that they are, they may feel happy to act alone or with the informal support of others. If they seek the support of their Quaker community to uphold them in their concern then they will need to take their concern to their local meeting for further testing. At this stage it is the local meeting as a community that will need to discern how to respond.

A local meeting may offer spiritual or practical support to a Friend without adopting their concern. Alternatively, the local meeting may unite with the concern, seeing it as something that the whole community should take on. Many concerns will remain

at the local meeting level. Some concerns will feel bigger than that, and Friends may want to ask a wider group of Quakers for further discernment to see if they can play a part. Local meetings can send minutes about their concerns to area meetings. Area meetings will be able to send minutes about their concerns to Yearly Meeting.

The guidance in [Quaker faith & practice paragraphs 4.19-4.20](#) refers to area meetings sending concerns to Meeting for Sufferings but will be equally applicable to concerns that go to Yearly Meeting.

How will the agenda for a continuing Yearly Meeting be decided?

The agenda for continuing yearly meeting sessions will be set by an agenda committee. When there are four sessions to plan each year, we will need to modify our processes a bit. It will be for the new agenda committee to work things through, but the following aspects may be important:

- The agenda committee should concentrate on the topics for and content of the sessions, using its discernment to test if issues are ready to come to Yearly Meeting and to make decisions between different issues that could come.
- We may find that we develop a natural progression for business. New concerns or issues may be raised by committees and meetings, may go on to the agenda for initial discernment, may be sent away for further consideration elsewhere, and then may come back to another one or even two Yearly Meeting sessions for further corporate discernment. The agenda committee will be responsible for keeping track of these issues and ensuring there is time to return to them as planned.
- The creation of basic agenda templates (which could always be adjusted if the business required it) could make sense and help Friends to understand the time slots that are available.
- Many of the practical arrangements for Yearly Meeting sessions could be delegated to staff to work on. This already works well at Meeting for Sufferings.

Will the agenda committee have too much power?

Almost all meetings for worship for business will have an agenda and some Friends will have responsibility for drawing that agenda up. In smaller meetings it can be possible to add things or re-jig them at short notice, and the agenda-setting process may be fairly informal. In larger meetings that last a whole day or longer it is important that there is a set agenda that allows Friends to prepare and to manage their energy levels. What goes on the agenda may need to be agreed weeks or even months in advance and changing the agenda after publication can be difficult.

In those circumstances it may feel like the committee setting the agenda has a lot of power. Quakers can and do give authority to others to do work on our behalf, and this should only cause hurt if that authority is not used as directed by the spirit. We

will need our agenda committee to be truly spirit-led, with individuals setting aside what most interests them and asking what the Yearly Meeting most needs right now.

It is likely that the new agenda committee will be smaller than the current Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee. However, there is no other reason to think that the new committee would be more powerful than the current version as Yearly Meeting would not give it any additional authority. The agenda committee will report to Yearly Meeting each time it is held and there will be chances for Friends to raise matters with the committee.

As the new agenda committee develops its ways of working it will be important to ensure that there are chances for the wider body of Friends to contribute to the committee's discernment. If we find that aspects of an agenda haven't worked well for us as individuals we will need to share our feedback while recognising that what was a negative for one person could be a positive for another.

What about the name 'Meeting for Sufferings'?

We have heard from some Friends who feel that we could lose something important by laying aside completely the name 'Meeting for Sufferings'. In particular, some Friends feel that the use of the name makes a clear link with our historic practice of recording the sufferings of Friends for their faith.

When we have a continuing Yearly Meeting then Meeting for Sufferings will not continue to meet as it does now – we will be able to take all of the business to Yearly Meeting.

Once Meeting for Sufferings ceases to meet as it does now, we may still wish to use its name for some or part of a national-level meeting for worship for business. If we do this then we will need to make sure that using the name doesn't cause any confusion about the authority of the meeting – when a business meeting is a part of Yearly Meeting then that must always be clear. We will also need to ensure it is clear whether such a business meeting is open to all or restricted to appointed Friends.

There may be creative ways to maintain the name in use and minute 37 of Yearly Meeting 2024 asked the new agenda committee to think about this. Friends who have ideas on this are welcome to send them to rco@quaker.org.uk.

These changes feel rushed – why hasn't more time been given to considering them?

Ensuring the right amount of time for discernment in different places is difficult. Many area meetings did engage with the discernment in the run up to Yearly Meeting 2024 but we have heard from others that they would have liked more time.

The work that led to the proposal to hold a continuing Yearly Meeting goes back a fair way. At the latest, it started with the appointment of a specific review group in October 2020. That review group was accountable to Meeting for Sufferings. Meeting

for Sufferings heard six reports and was very engaged in the work throughout. Area meetings will mainly have kept in touch with the work through the reports of Meeting for Sufferings representatives. However, information has also been shared through Quake!, on the Area Meeting Clerks online discussion group, in sessions at Yearly Meeting in 2023 and through contact with Quaker Recognised Bodies.

Some Friends may not be comforted to hear that others have been considering these issues for a long time. However, we know that we do not each need to have a discerned position on everything if we are able to trust that discernment done elsewhere has been done well. Yearly Meeting 2024 was able to unite with the proposal and to agree to take it forward.

There is more discernment yet to be done, especially in relation to the role of the new agenda committee. Between now and May 2025 issues will continue to be taken to Meeting for Sufferings and all area meetings are encouraged to keep in touch with their representative and to ensure that they have the information they need about anything that will be going forward to Yearly Meeting 2025.

What about children and young people?

Whenever Yearly Meeting is held there will be a programme for children and young people to attend.

What is happening about Yearly Meeting Gatherings?

Longer Yearly Meeting events that include the option to stay over in dedicated accommodation may be referred to as either residential Yearly Meetings or Yearly Meeting Gatherings. In this document we have used the term residential Yearly Meetings.

It is clear that there is enthusiasm for a longer, residential event – Friends have spoken clearly about how they have missed these opportunities to gather. However, we also know that the financial cost of these events to Friends and to Britain Yearly Meeting as a whole is significant and so we cannot hold them too often.

We think that there will be residential events in the future and that they will happen no more often than once every three years. We believe that it may be helpful to hold a residential event when the Book of Discipline Revision Committee is ready to bring forward a substantive report on possible new text, which might be in summer 2027.

Residential events take a lot of planning and so we expect that the current Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee (YMAC) will look at the options for the future and make a recommendation to Meeting for Sufferings before too long.

Will there be changes to *Quaker faith & practice* to cover the change to a continuing Yearly Meeting?

Yes, there will need to be changes because some of the structure and constitution of Britain Yearly Meeting will change and our book of discipline needs to remain accurate. Yearly Meeting 2024 has asked Meeting for Sufferings, through its Church Government Advisory Group (CGAG), to bring forward new draft constitutional text. CGAG will consult with other relevant committees, including the Book of Discipline Revision Committee.

Is there still a review of central committees happening?

Yes. The committee review is being done by the Group to Review Central Structures (GRCS). They are working on their final proposals and they hope to bring some business to Yearly Meeting 2025. More information will be shared with Meeting for Sufferings and more widely in the coming months.

How can I find out more?

We will keep this document updated with new questions and answers as they arise. If you have specific questions of your own then feel free to email them to rco@quaker.org.uk. If your meeting would like someone to talk to them then please do ask – we will arrange this if we can.

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