**Reparations – What comes next?**

At Yearly Meeting 2022, Friends committed to take action with regard to making reparations for the harms of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and economic exploitation. The decision was a first step, a recognition of our failings and an expression of our accountability and responsibility – but the BYM minutes did not try to spell out what reparations might look like. Instead, we committed to “*deep consideration*” and to “*look at ways to make meaningful reparations*”. BYM Trustees are putting in place important steps in exploration and decision-making with regard to the ways that we work and manage our resources.[[1]](#footnote-1) Other Quaker bodies such as Friends World Committee for Consultation are also following up on the question of reparations.

It seems vital that our next steps are taken with a sense of leading and unity, and this will require a collective effort to clarify what we mean by making reparations in practice. This note is offered towards that collective effort.

Questions include:

* What specific problems was Yearly Meeting recognising that we should make reparations for?
* What is the link between our grief about our responsibility for historical wrongs and our sense of accountability?
* What kinds of reparative actions are meaningful and most worthwhile?
* What is the scale of what is needed?
* What are the qualities and the spirit that we bring to this?

1. What exactly are we recognising and acknowledging?

I think there are three main parts to the **scope** of what we are recognising as our responsibility:

*Firstly*, BYM in 2022 heard about Quakers in the 18th and 19th Century who profited from enslavement of people, and we heard about the slowness and variable response of Friends at the time, regarding enslavement. This knowledge is set in contrast to the knowledge that we have and value, about Quakers being in the forefront of anti-slavery action. In fact, both sets of facts are true, and it adds up to Quakers responding in a patchy way. It was important that at the same Yearly Meeting, we also heard from Friends about their current experiences of racism.

If these profits from slavery just meant that some elite historic Quakers were not willing to look at the implications and impacts of their businesses, then we might only take it as a salutary moment: knowing about their limited perspectives might help us question whether there are unpalatable truths that we ourselves are avoiding (both in our past and present). But it might not trigger a specific effort to make amends for their actions long ago. Their historic profits from slavery might not impel Friends to do much. However, it’s more difficult than that: Quaker historic wealth fed into our institutional infrastructure – the buildings and finances that we still use.

If we want to move towards untangling ourselves from the heritage of slavery, we may need to focus on what to do about the assets accumulated through unpaid and stolen labour that are still embedded in our Quaker institutions.

*Secondly*, going beyond the specific legacy of historic slavery, Friends have recognised the racialised and divisive privilege of many Quakers and how our lives are associated with an economy rooted in exploitation. We acknowledged that racism and colonialism have been present in our perspectives, relationships, and communities. Our country used and still uses its power to extract resources from all parts of the globe in unfair, inhuman ways – ways that amount to robbery and sometimes involve forced labour. Our country and its powerful financial markets and business institutions have been complicit with other governments that exploit their own people. Corrupt, undemocratic governments have allowed our businesses to have unfettered access. A significant part of our country’s wealth was not come by honestly.[[2]](#footnote-2)

At the same time, it’s true that many Friends have always objected, voted, and protested against this exploitation, worked for an alternative, and assisted those affected. Also, Friends in the UK include some who have materially benefited to a great extent from racialised privilege and the structure of the global economy – and some who have benefited to a much lesser extent. There are many other structural inequities that intersect, meaning that some Friends’ lives and livelihoods are a struggle. – but still, our household economies are entangled with the unjust power of our country’s economy.

*Thirdly*, our concern about reparations is also a concern about how we approach the tasks of mitigating global warming and calling for climate justice. We recognise that the unjust impacts – the loss and damage – of climate change have built up over our own lifetimes. We see the ongoing links between contemporary slavery and climate change, as part of a carbon-profligate society, for which we feel a responsibility.

When considering reparations, this is indicative of the **range of harms** that we want to try to repair. Doing so means using our time and resources to the fullest extent possible, as individuals and collectively as Quakers. To take action on these issues together as a community, we need to come to a gathered understanding, and the process to reach that understanding is not a delay or time wasted – though it is urgent.

**Sections of relevant Minutes from BYM 2022**

*We have heard that love and justice also require us to consider deeply how the Society of Friends in Britain might make financial and other reparation for our part in the wrongs of the transatlantic slave trade*. Part of Minute 27, BYM 2022

*We have heard ministry about the importance of true listening which pushes us to action. We have also heard encouragement to move forward with acknowledgment and apology for how our wealth has been linked to the enslavement of people. We do not need to have a perfect understanding of our response to history in order to take action. We have heard that Quakers and others are already taking forward work to understand how reparations might be made for the harms of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and economic exploitation, the trauma and impact of which is felt in the lives of Friends and others today. We do not need to begin this work afresh, but can build upon the foundations laid by others and work with partners including other churches and faith groups. We ask Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, Meeting for Sufferings and area meetings to examine the resources which they hold on trust, and to consider how they, and we, could move forward with this work.* Part of Minute 33, BYM 2022

*Britain Yearly Meeting resolves to build on our decision last year to be an anti-racist church, working with partners, including churches and faith groups, to look at ways to make meaningful reparations for our failings. We need to take urgent action as individuals, in our local, area and yearly meetings*. Part of the Epistle of BYM 2022

1. What is the link between our recognition of what has happened and our sense of accountability and responsibility? Is it about shame and guilt?

We feel strongly about the wrongs and injuries that have happened and we want to put things right, but Friends are unlikely to root our response in continuous shame and guilt. The urgency of action means we cannot let ourselves get stuck there. And besides, following early Friends, we have never “talked up sin” (as early Quakers accused the Calvinists of doing). While taking seriously the darkness in us and around us, we tend to believe - and often actually know - that the Light can lead us out of it. In QF&P 27.26, Janet Scott (1980) affirms that *“if we follow the leadings of this Spirit faithfully we are led out of sin into unity with the divine will; that this unity leads us into love of and care for all humankind, who are our kin”.*

Our corporate worship is a central part of the mechanics of the Quaker life that we believe can help to weaken evil. Advices and Queries #9 asks Friends to “*Yield yourself and all your outward concerns to God’s guidance so that you may find ‘the evil weakening in you and the good raised up’ ”*.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Trusting in this power, we can hope to move on, to figure out the nuts and bolts of how to do better and to take responsibility. Our minute from 2019 Yearly Meeting resonates with the quote from Isaiah below: *Minute 17: Looking through the lens of privilege at climate justice and inclusion:* “Rather than guilt or shame which takes us nowhere, we need accountability and responsibility for our actions. Where we have privilege, we must look at what we are doing to perpetuate it.”

And our “guilt” itself is complicated by the reality that we’ve not been doing nothing. Many have been doing multiple jobs in ways that we hope were open to the Spirit. And we were working for peace, marching with CND, serving in prisons, boycotting apartheid, testifying on climate change, and many other worthwhile actions. We’ve tried to build Quaker communities where Friends could be supported to live their testimonies. But as with historic Quakers, our efforts have been patchy, and sometimes coming from a sense that the real problem was rather separate from us - something we could collectively externalise and complain about.

Isaiah 58: 6 – 12, New International Version:

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?****7****Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?****8****Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.****9****Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,****10****and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.****11****The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.****12****Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.*

1. What is our practical response going to be? What do reparations look like?

Across history, reparations have taken many different forms. A core focus is on repairing what has happened in the past, seeking to restore right relationships, and doing it in ways that are substantial, often involving redistribution of wealth that was accumulated through violence, degradation, and abuse.

One of the first steps is often apology and truth-telling processes. Quakers have begun that through our Yearly Meeting consideration, the resulting Minutes and many other opportunities for listening, learning and reflection. For example, some Friends have engaged in small study groups to learn about white privilege.

For economic and practical reparations, there are several options:

Firstly, there is a traditional approach, which is to find the descendants of enslaved individuals and give them appropriate compensation. This is now generally seen as too limited of an approach in most contexts, and it doesn’t take into account that the system of slavery had and still has a much wider impact. The perspective of Bayard Rustin about individual reparations from 1969 is interesting – though we should not take his voice as speaking for all descendants of those enslaved: “If my great-grandfather picked cotton for 50 years, then he may deserve some money, but he’s dead and gone and nobody owes me anything.”

Secondly, reparations can take the form of channelling support to the local/regional communities affected, to contribute to redressing the disadvantages they face because of slavery, colonialism and racist structures.

**Green Street Meeting, Germantown, Pennsylvania** in May 2022 announced that it plans to give $500,000 in reparations to black neighbours over the next decade. It has started by providing a legal clinic to help black homeowners to address problems such as tangled titles, wills and deed transfers. Their decision was based on acknowledgement of some Quakers as slaveholders during the 18th C, as well as what they saw as local Quakers’ slow response to the local black civil and economic rights movement in the 60s and 70s. The decision followed conversations on white privilege and racial diversity and a six month ‘spirituality of money’ workshop.

Thirdly, reparations can consist of investments and efforts in ensuring that past exploitation, and structural and physical violence do not persist, more broadly. In a sense, this form of reparations is also making sure that our own descendants do not have to make amends for injustices that we continue to build into the institutions, communities, and society that they will inherit. For us now, this might mean that we focus our reparations mostly, but not exclusively, on efforts to put right the injustice that is causing the most severe harm in our lifetimes: it would be supporting efforts for a just transition from a carbon-based economy, in order to mitigate the effects of the climate emergency on people who are the most vulnerable, and to ensure they have resources to try to adapt and survive.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Linked with this, QPSW has developed useful principles for our climate justice analysis. These are principles that also helpfully connect this work with the need to repair harms from the past:

A picture containing text, screenshot, font, document

Description automatically generated

Our process of identifying which actions for reparations are meaningful and worthwhile should be rooted in Quaker discernment, including factual, expert evidence and truth – especially the guidance of those who have been most affected. Our worldwide Quaker connections, especially through FWCC, may help us in seeking out that guidance.

These actions might consciously build on and expand existing Quaker work, such as:

* Support for local movements and community-based programmes in the places most vulnerable to the climate crisis, as they organise activities for adaptation and mitigation. We would make sure to support initiatives that are planned through community demand and local insights, rather than designed by donor agencies. Quaker Africa Interest Group (QAIG) has recommendations and experience about this, as do many international agencies like Peace Direct that are seeking to “decolonise” their assistance.
* Going beyond these small streams of support that Quakers can give directly, we can build up our advocacy, in collaboration with other organisations, for UK policies that would invest in new energy sources in poorer countries and in climate-resilient food production. We would advocate for urgent removal of debt burdens on affected countries and for the required scale of support for the international Loss and Damage fund, agreed (with QUNO participation) at the COP27 conference in 2022[[5]](#footnote-5). By 2030, the impact of climate change around the world will lead to losses of around $300 - $600 billion per year.[[6]](#footnote-6) Responsibility for contributing to this fund needs to be shared out fairly and equitably, so that those individuals who have built significant wealth as well as corporations that have built their assets through tax havens, polluting industries or exploitative practices pay much more than the families who have only benefited in smaller ways and families who may already be economically struggling within wealthy societies.
* We can advocate for the UK to help create an international system for sharing responsibility for welcoming millions of climate and conflict refugees – a fair system based on factors such as historic responsibility and colonial linkages, and each country’s wealth and capacity. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change forecasts that climate change will lead to at least 800 million more refugees and displaced people in total by 2050 (with many more internally displaced people). This is about 8 times the current number.
* We could give more of our time and resources to activities to prevent the UK’s financial institutions investing in and underwriting fossil fuels or other high carbon developments. For example, Lloyds provides 60% of all global insurance for fossil fuel projects. It might include initiatives such as seeking to amend the statute of the International Criminal Court to recognise ecocide as a fifth crime against the peace and security of humanity.
* We could support work to reduce our country’s carbon footprint radically and urgently, including rationing/taxing of high carbon products both at household and industry level, and preventing new UK government investments in fossil fuels.

**What would this look like in practice?**

For Friends, this process of repair and restoration is an active response to the promptings of love and truth. It can involve and bring change in our mind, our spirit, and our body. It will continue to join us with non-Quakers who are on a similar path. In practice, it is a mixture of individual steps, as well as local collective actions linked together across BYM, and actions that we request from our Quaker national committees and representatives. It will be costly at all these levels.

Here are some examples that come to mind:

**Witness and arrest at the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair in 2019.** My Friend Jean explained to me why she’d been arrested. Hundreds of us had been sitting in a meeting for worship in the road leading up to the ExCel exhibition centre. Trucks delivering armaments for display were inconvenienced by the blockage.Jean explained that during the worship, she found she was connecting very deeply with the pain and suffering caused by the arms trade that the UK supports. She had earlier taken time to learn about the arms trade. She was thinking especially of the people in Yemen who are under attack from weapons that the UK sells to Saudi Arabia. She felt she was really with them, and the sound of the normal east London air traffic overhead was bringing that feeling to life. She allowed herself to feel some of the terror that people in parts of Yemen go through. She was in a place where she could be guided by love.

After the scheduled time for our worship, the police worked hard and politely to try to get each person to shift. We saw one police officer come up to Jean a couple of times and gently explain that if she continued to sit there, he would have to arrest her. She had never been arrested before. This was not a familiar experience. Jean explained to him that she had to do this and that she was acting under concern for people affected by war. Between Jean and the police officer, there was no confrontation. Watching the interaction, it seemed that there was a human, very serious, and, even, friendly connection. It seemed they were both doing what they had to do, with quite a lot of mutual care and respect. The need for the arrest was almost like a shared problem between them.

Jean was not acting out of an ego-focused guilt, but she felt responsibility, an awareness that we are connected to our country’s arms sales. Friends’ testimony at DSEI does not stop the arms industry in its tracks, but, alongside other organisations, it does show that there is not consensus or acceptance of this evil trade.

**Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network is an example of bringing together local actions to strengthen our witness and to ensure that our national BYM testimony stays close to people’s experiences.** QARN is anetwork open to all Friends who want to change the way that refugees and asylum seekers are treated, to ensure that justice and compassion are the guiding principles. It brings together Quakers in many different places across the UK in the work we’re doing. We share information and mutual guidance, and we work closely with BYM staff to support the Yearly Meeting’s Concern on asylum matters, for example, helping with interaction with policy makers on immigration laws. Members of QARN serve as links with lots of other non-Quaker groups – including those led by migrants and asylum seekers - that are working on issues such as detention, access to public funds, gaining asylum seeker status, and accessing immigration lawyers etc. The warmth of the group, its expertise and use of Quaker methods make it a great support to Friends who are doing very challenging local work, campaigning and standing with people in this violent and cruel environment. This type of support is important in sustaining our efforts for reparations.

Reparations, especially regarding finances and buildings that are affected by colonial and slave trade wealth, may need to go beyond doing more of what we’re already doing. We can learn from what other institutions, including faith-based institutions, are doing. For some, the approach to reparations is a combination of actions focused on their specific history (how their institution financially benefited from specific contexts of slavery) as well as a deeper process of reorientation and decolonisation of their work, alongside seeking unity and reconciliation.

**United Society Partners in the Gospel** (USPG) which used to be the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel is a good example. USPG has a clear strand of opposition to slavery within its history, but it also has what it describes as its darkest, most shameful period: In 1710, it received a bequest of two plantations in Barbados, where for over 100 years, USPG’s predecessor organisation financially benefited from the labour of enslaved people.

Now, as well as making unreserved apology, USPG is focusing on the question of specific reparations through supporting the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) Reparations Commission agenda. The Commission is a regional body created to establish the moral, ethical, and legal case for the payment of reparations by the governments of all the former colonial powers and the relevant institutions of those countries, to the nations and people of the Caribbean Community for the crimes against humanity of native genocide, the transatlantic slave trade, and the system of chattel slavery. <https://caricomreparations.org/>

At the same time, USPG highlights that *“there are dangers of reducing reparation to issues of finance as if slave ownership were a debt that could be “settled” by any financial transaction. The legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and our colonial history are deep and pervasive, as the Windrush scandal and Black Lives Matter campaign have made clear. USPG is engaging in a process of understanding its own culpability as a colonial actor better through an intentional exploration of its archives, in dialogue with the Church in the Province of the West Indies.”*

1. How much is enough?

The USPG recognition that there are dangers of seeing these issues as a debt that can be “settled” through a financial transaction is helpful, but if we do not estimate the scale of what is needed, it might become too vague and insubstantial. Other groups and institutions have found that seeking truth and understanding about the quantity of funds passed on to them through the slave trade has helped them to dig deeper into their time, resources, comfort, and economic security and to take practical actions.

Would it be helpful to consider the **buildings and reserves held by** **Quakers collectively in BYM** and to have information about the quantity of these assets that are connected to historic slavery? Is that feasible and sufficiently worthwhile? Is it a priority, given what BYM may already know about these assets? The Anglican Church Commissioners have started to examine their assets, and they brought in research expertise to help them. Other churches, such as the Methodist Church, are commissioning similar research about their assets that are affected by the slave trade.

The **Church of England** has a wide range of initiatives focused on addressing social divisions, becoming a carbon neutral church and on environmental restoration. Specifically with regard to the transatlantic slave trade, the Church Commissioners have undertaken important work: The Church Commissioners manage the £10.3bn investment fund, which is used to support the Church of England in various ways. In 2019, the Church Commissioners decided to conduct research into the *Queen Anne’s Bounty*, a predecessor fund of the Church Commissioners’ endowment, which had links with transatlantic slavery. They worked with forensic accountants and academics to scrutinise original documents and ledgers and published a detailed report on the findings.

The research found that:

* In the 18th century, the Queen Anne’s Bounty invested significant amounts of its funds in the South Sea Company, a company that traded in enslaved people. It also received numerous benefactions, many of which are likely to have come from individuals linked to, or who profited from, transatlantic chattel slavery and the plantation economy.
* Queen Anne’s Bounty funds were subsumed into the Church Commissioners’ endowment when it was created in 1948, perpetuating the legacy of Queen Anne’s Bounty’s linkages to transatlantic chattel slavery.

The Church Commissioners said they were deeply sorry about these links and committed £100 million of funding over 9 years (starting in 2023) to a programme of investment, research, and engagement, especially focusing on improving opportunities for communities affected by historic slavery, as well as helping dioceses and parishes to research and address their historic links with transatlantic chattel slavery. They will also continue to use their voice as a responsible investor to combat modern slavery.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/church-commissioners-england/who-we-are/church-commissioners-links>

Should our **local and Area Meetings** also undertake a similar process (as Green Street Friends did in Pennsylvania)? There may be some Area Meetings where members suspect that there might be strong links with slavery and exploited labour, and in those areas, Friends might want to dig into the archives, using the guidance pamphlet prepared by BYM. But for local and Area Meetings that only have minor assets, Friends may not find it productive to spend time on this research.

In 2020, in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, **Lancaster Friends** looked into the archives of Quakers in the area. They found that between 1711 and 1833, 18 Lancaster Quaker merchants were involved in the transatlantic slave trade and some owned enslaved people on their plantations. These Quakers were not formally censured by Lancaster Meeting at the time, despite Quakers nationally asking for those involved in the ‘iniquitous trade’ to be disowned. Some of the members of these families were disowned by Lancaster Meeting for debt, or for marrying a non-Quaker, or privateering with an armed vessel – but not for trading in or owning enslaved people.

Lancaster Friends have put up a plaque to acknowledge this historical connection with slavery, stating that they seek to address the impact that slavery’s legacy has today. They have also produced a leaflet about this, to be available in the city museums and at the Meeting House. Lancaster Friend, Ann Morgan, presented their findings at Britain Yearly Meeting, contributing to our decision to make reparations.

**Families and Quaker-linked businesses** with significant assets that may have direct links with the slave trade or directly exploited labour, may feel that in-depth research is right. For most of us, however, our assets may not be so significant. Some may have benefited from an economy that allowed us more scope to build a pension or work to pay off a mortgage. If we’re white, we have had unfair privileges which we need to understand; and if we’re citizens of the UK, we may have had unfair economic benefits based on international patterns of exploitation. But it may not make sense to try to repair those wrongs with exact financial equations.

Then what should be the basis for our personal efforts to redress inequalities? With what guidance can we help each other? One source of guidance could be the insights of John Woolman, on balancing our personal needs with those of others. An evolving and truthful perspective on our income and resources can continue to help us to live more simply.

QFP 23.14. John Woolman, 1763

*“Our gracious Creator cares and provides for all his creatures. His tender mercies are over all his works; and so far as his love influences our minds, so far we become interested in his workmanship and feel a desire to take hold of every opportunity to lessen the distresses of the afflicted and increase the happiness of the creation. Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable, that to turn all the treasures we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives…”.*

What are some steps we can take financially towards “*turning our treasures as channels of universal love*” as well as rationing our carbon use? How far would we go with our time, security, and resources to try to stop some of the worst impacts of climate change predicted by the IPCC or to work for other forms of restoration and remedy? In the absence of sufficient UK government action for social equity, what are the real calculations we should try to make for ourselves?

Britain Yearly Meeting’s Giving Advocates group have prepared a 3 page pamphlet “How much should I give to support Quaker work?”[[7]](#footnote-7) (which is not about giving exclusively to Quaker work). The pamphlet has suggestions on how to self-assess our capacity to give, and it recognises that many may be on low incomes and not able to give at all. It mentions a simple tool that individuals can use as a starting point, to see how their household fits into the UK’s national income scale.[[8]](#footnote-8)

As we look at our own income and expenditure, it’s helpful to look at bank statements, to see what we really need for warmth, nourishment and shelter, for providing as modestly as possible for basic future needs and for care and development of our children and others who depend on us – the kind of care and wellbeing that we want for everyone. Beyond that, what more can we let go of, recycling funds to where they can immediately do more good? For Friends on low income, whose income does not properly meet their needs, this may not be relevant, but some Friends find it’s helpful to make a practice of looking at their bank balance once a month, to see what income can be given away without going into debt, in addition to any regular committed donations.

In addition to our finances, our “treasures” include many other aspects. For example, can we look at increasing the time we give to the work of mending our world? If we have a job, that job may already be about healing, helping, educating, sustaining, and renewal. If not, can we reduce our paid hours and get involved in other ways? If we have a spare room, can we make it available through one of the supported arrangements for hosting refugees or care leavers?[[9]](#footnote-9)

In addition, there are sources of guidance online about reducing our household carbon footprint such as the widely-used Climate Hero Carbon Calculator.[[10]](#footnote-10)

This is not a call to deprive or hurt our families and ourselves, but we need to be ready to make changes we haven’t yet considered. We can help to make sure that greatly increased resources are available especially for campaigns and initiatives that go beyond household-level decisions and that focus on changing government policies and business practices. As we do this, we need to stay connected to the motivation of repairing and mending, redressing inequities, not ego-driven guilt.

1. What are the qualities and the spirit we bring to reparations?

As we learn more about the unfairness, the inequities – the violent theft – that underlies the economic status of our society in the UK and in some cases, of our households, it makes it easier to let go of what we should not have. In addition, as we move ahead on reparations, perhaps it is the desire for unity, to undo the brokenness, that is at the heart of making amends.

One part of the spirit we bring to this is that we need to move together with many other people. **It needs conversations**. So far, there has not been much public support for reparations in the UK. Most of us have not been taught about the impact of colonialism or racism in school, and there is not much in mainstream culture that would give people insights to the need for climate justice. To learn, you still have to search it out. The instinct to close the door against people fleeing violence and destitution is not justifiable, but we need to understand it in this cultural context. Generally, in the public mind, it is not recognised that the UK’s history and economy is closely linked with the reasons why people need to migrate. Even our “aid-giving” institutions have often invoked pity but not much understanding: the “why” questions have not been sufficiently raised.

To have these conversations, perhaps we need to better equip ourselves to talk about our **grounds for hope**, so that the conversation is not all about guilt, or fear, or itemising what we must give up. There is now no scientific doubt that we are running out of time and that the consequences are terrifying. But we DO have the resources to make amends in a meaningful way, as well as the technology and knowledge to prevent the very worst impacts of climate change.[[11]](#footnote-11) Our actions right now CAN bring sooner the time when those impacts start to reduce. This is why each step we take – as well as actions that we push our institutions, workplaces, and government to take – can help us all simply feel better. Also, the actions we need to take are focused on what most people really want – clean energy, good food produced without harm, an economy with sustainable jobs. We actually can make a difference.

A second quality of undertaking reparations is that, as Friends, we need to help each other through these uncomfortable shifts and altered priorities. **It’s a collective effort**. For example, at DSEI, Jean would not have been there on her own, if Friends had not been part of organising the protest. Lancaster Friends undertook the process of examining their history as a whole Meeting. We need to uphold each other as we concentrate on efforts within the different spaces that we can already reach. As we prioritise these collective actions, it adds to our inclination to simplify our Quaker structures so we can give enough time and attention to this.

Thirdly, we’ll be trying to “decolonise” the way we work on solutions, and to try to do this work consciously alongside non-white people. It means basing the work on **vibrant connections, listening and proximity** to people most affected by racism and to the groups and collective institutions they have created - while we keep an **honest memory** of past abuses of power.

Finally, despite the onslaught of crises we see all around, the immediate tasks in themselves **need not be grim**. That is not our experience. In fact, perhaps this costly and urgent path to putting things right is our only path to real joy? Without hiding our times of hopelessness and anger, we can witness to a sense of peace and purpose in the midst of these tasks, individually and as a community.

What does the world need, to come through this chaotic and tragic time, and to pull the turning point towards us? Can we reach out without hesitation or inhibition to suggest that it is radical and practical love, answering “that of God” in all creation? Can we cheerfully take our share in this work, this love, this prayer?

Ginny Baumann, Streatham and Brixton Local Meeting

August 2023

1. BYM Trustees Minute 3, March 2023: Trustees agreed to a Phase 1 of learning, understanding the present situation and its origins and exploring good practice elsewhere and developing our thinking; followed by a Phase 2, to translate this work into a series of actions – perhaps including research and advocacy – to allow us to live up to the commitment made by Yearly Meeting 2022. Minute 3 includes further discernment about BYM response, recognising the activities undertaken by other Quaker and non-Quaker bodies. Non-confidential minutes of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees' meetings are available from the Recording Clerk's Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See *What the UK owes in reparations,* by Hasit Shah, in Quartz, 6 Oct 2020, <https://qz.com/1911783/what-the-uk-owes-in-reparations> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://jollyquaker.com/2021/05/03/what-does-quaker-faith-and-practice-say-about-sin-and-evil/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a good source of sound information about the current status, risks and measures against climate change. Here is a summary of their 2023 findings: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/resources/spm-headline-statements/>

   On current trends, the IPCC report says it is likely that warming will reach 1.5°C between 2030 - 2035. “*The choices and actions implemented in this decade will have impacts now and for thousands of years*”. They say that at current levels of emissions, many parts of the planet will become unliveable in the next few decades. This 2 minute video, of a presentation at the Davos meeting in 2023 highlights the inter-relationship of ecosystem tipping points around the world: [16 Tipping points](https://www.weforum.org/videos/how-16-tipping-points-could-push-our-entire-planet-into-crisis) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In 2022, COP27 decided to set up funding arrangements for responding to the loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, especially in lower income countries. Before that, there had been resistance from wealthier countries to having any connection to financial “compensation” within approaches to address loss and damage. The COP27 decision to commit to funding arrangements was historic in connecting consequence, accountability and financial support. It will be important to ensure that wealthier nations do not delay the operationalising of this fund or say that financial resources are not available to commit. See: *An informal QUNO Analysis of the COP27 decision on funding arrangements for responding to loss and damage,* paper by Alana M Carlson with Lindsey Fielder Cook. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As a comparison, the IMF reported in 2020 that the G20 countries invested $9 trillion altogether in fighting COVID even by May 2020, in spending measures as well as loans and guarantees. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2020/05/20/tracking-the-9-trillion-global-fiscal-support-to-fight-covid-19>. In the UK, the government spent an estimated £310 billion to £410 billion in COVID-19 measures. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9309/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Available here: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/how-much-should-i-give> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://ifs.org.uk/tools_and_resources/where_do_you_fit_in> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. E.g. <https://www.hopeathome.org.uk/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://carbon-calculator.climatehero.me/?source=GoogleKeywords&gclid=CjwKCAjw4ZWkBhA4EiwAVJXwqWIM2JWByJX55X3_fSr8XDpIG8C4FdSomS69JbygAVoA_SHSRZZgtBoCxvkQAvD_BwE> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://onbeing.org/programs/katharine-hayhoe-our-future-is-still-in-our-hands/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)