



Responding to racism

At their June 2021 meeting, the trustees of Britain Yearly Meeting continued their work on responding to racism. They agreed a statement on becoming an anti-racist employer and embedding anti-racism in all work programmes.

A statement from the trustees and senior management of Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) – the national charity supporting the witness and worship of Quakers in Britain

“Tackling racism is a spiritual imperative of our time and this affects our understanding and communication of Quaker history, and how Quakers live now.” Minute of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, August 2020

Racism in the UK, and the rest of the world, is a centuries old problem. British Quakers are part of society, and are therefore not immune from this. From debates about the morality of slavery in the 18th century, to considering our response to Black Lives Matter in 2020, we have been part of both the problem and the solution. We want to move from this ambivalent position to a resolute, resonant one in line with our testimonies to equality and peace.

As both Britain Yearly Meeting, the charity, and the Quiet Company, we have been facing some hard truths. The trustees and staff of Britain Yearly Meeting accept that racism exists within the Religious Society of Friends in Britain and within our charity, and that we must tackle it. This includes racist behaviour directed at Quakers, at those we work with, at our staff – both intentionally and inadvertently – by Quakers and by our staff. We have also been guilty of not speaking up when we should have done so on issues of racism.

This is hard to admit, but recognising the problem is an important step in addressing it. We need to speak to each other lovingly about these issues and use our long experience of peace-building and conflict resolution to help us.

We are truly sorry for the pain that we have caused as an organisation, and, in line with our Quaker testimony to equality, we commit to doing better. To that effect, the trustees and senior management of the charity have developed an anti-racism action plan, with three strands:

- becoming an anti-racist employer;
- embedding anti-racism into all work programmes;
- and working with the wider Quaker community on a response to racism.

Progress will be reported regularly to trustees, whose minutes are publicly available, and circulated to staff.

We are committed to foregrounding the experiences of people who are most affected by racism and racial injustices including staff and Quakers of Colour. We will listen to, learn from and act on those experiences. This means being honest about ourselves and our own history.

We are committed to grounding our anti-racism work in the Quaker faith: listening to the Spirit; recognising each person is unique, precious and a child of God; praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.

We recognise the importance of learning, acknowledging failures, celebrating progress and sharing what we learn, and that race, class, gender and other social categorisations overlap to cause particular discrimination and disadvantage.

A long spiritual journey lies ahead, which needs humility, nourishment, and being open to changes of direction along the way

Britain Yearly Meeting will continue to support our BAME staff network and the Quaker Black, Brown, People of Colour Group.

As a church, the Religious Society of Friends in Britain will continue to consider a Quaker response to racism. Britain Yearly Meeting will invest significant resources into supporting this work, as well as the work of local Quaker communities and children and young people's groups.

All people have the right to feel supported and nourished in their spiritual environment and workplace, free from racism. We all have the responsibility to ensure this. It will not be comfortable; but it is necessary.

“What does it mean to live out our faith in the world, and to work with others to make a difference? We have been enlightened, inspired, and challenged to take heed of the promptings of love and truth in our hearts. It is love that draws us into the world and pulls us towards its brokenness.” Minute 38, Yearly Meeting 2017