



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

Minutes

BYM Trustees' Reparation Working Group, July 2026

Saturday 11 July 10.00 - 17.00 on Zoom

2026.07.01 Opening Worship

During our opening worship two passages from The Church of Scotland's Apology for its role in enslaving were read. They were taken from **Section 7 which addresses 'What Might Faithful Action Look Like'**

7.1.2 The work of repentance will require time, humility, and sustained commitment. It cannot be achieved through one-off actions or delegated to a single body. It involves confronting distorted theologies, inherited assumptions, and patterns of behaviour that continue to alienate and exclude. Such change must be shared work – undertaken with, not merely for, those most affected by the legacy of slavery.

7.2.2 There is no single global consensus on how these legacies should be addressed. Some contexts emphasise formal apologies, others material repair, institutional reform, or truth-telling and education. What unites these approaches is a shared recognition that slavery was not an isolated historical episode but a system that structured the modern world.

2026.07.02 Language as Reparative Practice

The Reparation Working Group has already adopted the practice of humanising the words we use to describe people who had things done to them and which make clear the actions which resulted in their condition and the situation they were forced to live with. We have replaced the word 'slave' with enslaved and the 'Transatlantic Chattel Slave Trade' with trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic. We now seek further to change the language we use.

We recognise that the words we use matter. They matter to those who receive them. They matter to us as those who initiate. The words we choose frame the conversation, set the feeling in the room the moment we open our mouths, and shape how comfortable — or uncomfortable — our interlocutors are. They reveal whether we exercise care, whether we see our partners as full persons, whether we offer them a voice in the very language of discussion. We recognise that language is continually changing. This paper speaks to the unfinished condition of our ongoing dialogue.

We have heard concerns about the use of the term Turtle Island to describe the USA and Canada in the paper presented. We understand that this is the term used by a number of the 1st nations people of some of those areas. As we seek to involve the Lenape people in our discernment process on reparation, we will use this phrase but provide alongside the colonial names for ease of reference by Friends where appropriate. We need to use language which does not distract from the main item we are asked to look at which is about enslaving. The name Turtle Island could be used as a distraction in discernment. It may also be annoying for people who are not living in the areas to which this phrase applies.

We will look again at the paper. In doing this we may need to determine who chooses the language. There are people trying to reclaim a name for themselves and we need to respect this. We need to make it clear that this name is provisional and that this is ongoing discernment.

The Clerks will provide a revised document prior to it being shared.

2026.07.03 What might Reparation look like?

We spent time considering a paper developed by MRJ which provides a response to the paper a 'Reparation Proposal - An Advisory Board to look at Finance' presented to our June Meeting.

MRJ's paper proposes a Reparation Working Group (temporary name) whose scope runs well beyond finance — covering truth-telling, acknowledgement, institutional reform, and relationship-building alongside any financial transfer, as a single combined remit, not an optional add-on.

We were asked:

Does the RWG favour a body confined to financial reparation — closer to the original paper's framing — or one whose remit explicitly includes truth-telling, acknowledgement, and institutional reform alongside any financial transfer.

We have discerned that the RWG sees reparation in its widest sense, including truth telling, acknowledging, apologising, repairing relationships, institutional reform and providing financial transfers.

We spent time in groups considering the rest of the paper and providing initial feedback on some of the questions. We feel the need to return to it at a future meeting for deeper discernment.

Concern was expressed that we need more involvement with QiB and FWCC to ensure that we have a shared understanding of where our reparation journey is going. We feel that we are not giving ourselves, the RWG that is, enough time to work through the issues we have to address prior to being laid down. The Co- Clerks will meet with PW to discuss what may be possible in terms of budget and thus time.

2026.07.04 Receive the Theological Research Report

We receive the report from Woodbrooke and the research team with grateful thanks.

In reading it one has to hold onto one's faith and be humbled by what has been found, it covers moral goodness and failure. There is a screaming absence of voices of the enslaved in Quaker Archives. They are only found when an enslaved person seeks to buy their freedom, then they are spoken of as loyal and hard working.

The report is painful to read in that we meet head on the sayings of George Fox about saving souls and supporting the Quaker community in Barbados but saying nothing about enslavement. It is also hard to see that there was no clear theological path for British Quakers being anti-slavery. There was a clear voice in Germantown in the 17th century but not in Britain.

We note that the report will be launched at the RWG Conference '**Truth and Repair – Our Quaker journey towards Justice**' on the 23 October 2026 at Friends House and on Zoom. A three-page summary will be sent to all who register and the full document will be available both in print or to download following the conference.

We thank Ben Wood, Lily Chadwick and Ben Pink Dandelion for undertaking this impressive research in what we know has been a short time frame.

We also express our thanks to the Advisory Board who supported this work: Robert Beckford, Dulcie Dixon McKenzie, Anthony Reddie, Esther Mombo, Maddy Pennington, Mark Russ, Ben Pink Dandelion, DF and AM.

We note the 3-session course which Woodbrooke are providing Thursday 03, 10 & 17 December to offer Friends the opportunity further to study the report.

We note that the report provides questions which Quaker book groups may find helpful if they read the report.

We ask that this minute is sent to all who have been involved in the development of the report.

2026.07.05 Meetings schedule for 2027

With the amendments suggested we accept the meeting schedule for 2027 and ask that dates are entered on the HUB diary as soon as possible.

2026.07.06 Clerks Update

a. Update from the Conference Planning Committee

We receive this paper. We note that registration for both attendance at Friends House and online is now open on the Woodbrooke Website

b. Update from the Acknowledgement and Apology Workstream

We receive this paper

c. Separated minutes from QWRC

We receive these minutes and thank SS for keeping the committee updated with our progress. We note the information about the FWCC online gathering and await information about the planned programme or an invitation to participate from those planning the gathering.

d. Report from the Racial Justice Network Meeting with the Co-Clerks

We have received this report and note that the document, developed mainly by EN, sent out following the event which covers guidance when dealing with difficult conversations or questions has been well received both in the UK and internationally. In addition, a one-page summary document has been developed which can be used as a handout when visiting meetings. A copy of both documents is attached to these minutes, and they will be placed on the Quakers in Britain website under reparation resources.

e. Update from Sheffield and Balby Area Meeting

At their Area Meeting in June, it was agreed that in addition to the sum already donated to the Quaker in Britain Reparation Fund the Area Meeting will make available to the fund a quarter of all legacies received which are not restricted.

f. Update on the Drop-in sessions.

We have heard that the June drop-in sessions each attracted 5 or 6 Friends. There were Trustees of Area Meetings wanting to be prepared for what might be asked of them in relation to reparation. Some shared experience of their diverse or otherwise Quaker communities. It was asked if reparation could be a response to the earth crisis? The Guardian Cotton Capitol Project was discussed. There was a call for an understanding of how our society has

formed. A fear was expressed that no one would want to join the Quaker church if we make our role in enslaving public. We were told that Quakers like meaningful minutes.

Further drop-in sessions are planned in July and August.

g. The Care Plan

We heard a brief introduction to the Care Plan which includes the language paper. That and further papers making up the Care Plan will be distributed to the RWG after Yearly Meeting 18 July.

h. A Swarthmore Lecture

A proposal for a Swarthmore Lecture based on reparation has been submitted for consideration by the Swarthmore Lecture Committee. Should the proposal be accepted by the committee the proposal will be shared and the RWG will be invited to discern who from the RWG might give the lecture.

2026.07.07 We closed in worship at 15.00

Clerked by Ann Morgan & Marghuerita Remi-Judah



Language as Reparative Practice

Reparation Working Group

This section helps Quakers in Britain to measure our impact. It should be completed by the author of the paper.

Author: Rita Remi-Judah and Ann Morgan

Submitted to: Reparation Working Group

Purpose of report: For feedback and decision

Background:

This paper has been written to reflect the changes to our language that we have made on our Reparation journey, and communicates the rationale behind these changes.

Questions to be considered by the committee:

- *How do we intend to use this paper? Who will we share this paper with?*

Language as Reparative Practice

Britain Yearly Meeting Reparation Working Group

Words, their rationale, and a living glossary

Statement on Language

On the issue of language, the Britain Yearly Meeting Reparation Working Group began with a simple but significant step: humanising the words we use to describe people who had things done to them.

We moved away from 'slavery', from 'transatlantic chattel slavery', and from the noun 'slaves'. In their place, we use language that humanises the people and makes visible the actions that resulted in their condition. Rather than a 'slave' — a word that feels remote, even static — we name the person as 'enslaved', because enslavement is something that was done to them; a process they were forced to live within.

Rather than 'transatlantic chattel slavery', which can read as a business transaction, we speak of 'the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic'. The word 'trafficking' denotes a criminal act and, we hope, evokes the moral revulsion that act deserves. We use 'enslavement' rather than 'slavery' for the same reason: it is a process, not a category. We talk about the economy and violence of enslavement to reflect the commodification of human beings: this speaks more to the truth of the existence rather than the economic and dehumanising 'slave trade'.

That was the beginning of our journey. But over the past two and a half years we have learnt so much more — words to use, words to set aside, and new words of our own. In this paper, we share the reasons behind our choices and invite you to join us.

We have spoken with people living with the legacy of enslavement. We say 'living' deliberately: rather than 'descendants of slaves' we call them 'people who are living with a legacy', because it is an all-encompassing reality. A legacy of enslavement is something inherited not only from one's antecedents, but from the conditioned environment those antecedents lived in — the emotions, the experiences, the generational trauma passed down through generations, and the ongoing water in which one swims: the racism encountered, the discrimination, the inequity, the absence of generational wealth and confidence that says, 'we can do this'.

We have renamed our Working Group the 'reparation' working group. This reflects us following the lead of Sonja Stanley Niaah of the UWI: reparation is a continuous process, not a series of acts. It separates our work from the legacy of the first World/European War, it grounds us in the act of this Quaker faith movement and distinguishes our endeavours from those of state institutions. We understand that our journey is long and progress may be slow. Indeed, it will be those living with the legacy who will determine whether our acts are reparative in their eyes.

We have also sought to understand the environment beyond the transatlantic experience. For example, we have learned that, for some, that the name 'America' is itself a colonial project: using it frames that part of the world through the coloniser's lens. We are in discussions about using to name the lands of the Western Hemisphere 'Turtle Island' instead of 'North America and Canada' and 'Abya Yala' instead of 'Central and South America'.

We have spoken with Friends across the continent of Africa, and Friends in the western hemisphere. We talked about what they are living with, and about language. We recognise that English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and others are colonial languages. We therefore question whether these should always be the languages of dialogue — both within the Quaker world and beyond it¹. If we genuinely wish to share space, are we willing to be the ones who must catch up, who require a translator, rather than always being those who determine what is discussed and in which tongue? The language of discussion ultimately frames the discussion itself.

We challenge ourselves on the word 'partnership' in religious and cross-cultural contexts. When the agenda is set by Europeans, speaking of 'joint endeavours' or 'joint enterprises' may more honestly reflect the work of redistribution still needed. This concern is repeatedly raised by individuals across the continent of Africa, the Caribbean, those residing in the Western Hemisphere and Abya Yala.

The words we use matter. They matter to those who receive them. They matter to us as those who initiate. The words we choose frame the conversation, set the feeling in the room the moment we open our mouths, and shape how comfortable — or uncomfortable — our interlocutors are. They reveal whether we exercise care, whether we see our partners as full persons, whether we offer them a voice in the very language of discussion.

We cannot always succeed. But we ask that we try — and that with every attempt, we place people's comfort and dignity at the centre. We also question whether English should always be the primary language of ministry when others in the room speak it as a second or additional language.

At its core, our journey is to humanise, use our words to enable transparency with the hope that equity and justice can be our collective endeavour.

¹We note that the four languages of Welsh, Irish Gaelic and Scottish Gaelic are also spoken by Friends in the UK.

Glossary of Terms

Terms in Current Use

The following terms have been adopted by the Working Group over the past two and a half years. Each entry explains what it replaces and why.

Term / Phrase	Replaces / Context	Rationale
Enslavement	<i>Slavery / being a slave</i>	Foregrounds that this was an act done to a person — an ongoing process imposed upon them — rather than a fixed identity.
Enslaved person	<i>Slave</i>	Restores humanity to the individual. The condition was imposed, not intrinsic.
The trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic	<i>Transatlantic chattel slavery / the slave trade</i>	Centres the human crime and its perpetrators. 'Human trafficking' evokes moral revulsion; 'chattel' and 'trade' risk framing atrocity as commerce.
People living with a legacy of enslavement	<i>Descendants of slaves</i>	Captures the present-tense, all-encompassing reality: inherited trauma, systemic racism, inequity, and the ongoing environment in which people live.
Turtle Island	<i>North America / USA, Canada, and Greenland</i>	"Turtle Island" is the term, translated into English, used by some Indigenous peoples of the North of the Western Hemisphere to refer to Earth ^[1] or North America (including Canada, Greenland and the USA). The name is based on an oral history once common to the Indigenous peoples of the Northeastern Woodlands, which today roughly encompasses southeastern

Term / Phrase	Replaces / Context	Rationale
		Canada and the northeastern United States By using this term, we would avoid imposing a colonial frame on the land and its peoples. Turtle Island in Lenape is Tulpehahink.
Abya Yala	<i>Latin America / South America</i>	Name used by Guna/Chibchan Indigenous peoples of the Southern and Central Western Hemisphere.
Colonial languages	<i>(English, French, Spanish, Portuguese used without comment)</i>	Acknowledges that the languages of dialogue are themselves products of colonisation and carry embedded power dynamics.
Joint endeavour / joint enterprise	<i>Partnership (in religious or cross-cultural contexts)</i>	'Partnership' implies equality; when agendas are set by one party, the word obscures the imbalance. 'Joint endeavour' invites honest renegotiation.

Proposed Additions

The terms below are proposed for adoption. They arise from ongoing conversations and reflect patterns of language that the Working Group believes would deepen the reparative intent of our work. They are offered for discernment and discussion.

Term / Phrase	Replaces / Context	Rationale
Reparative dialogue	<i>Reconciliation / reparations conversation</i>	Centres active repair rather than the more passive 'reconciliation'; signals that dialogue itself is part of the reparative work.
Agenda-holding	<i>Leadership / chairing</i>	Makes visible who controls what is discussed. Naming it opens space to redistribute that power deliberately.
Language-of-welcome	<i>Common language / working language</i>	Shifts the question from efficiency to hospitality: whose language makes people feel welcomed and whose excludes them.
Ministry in translation	<i>Translated ministry / interpretation</i>	Reframes translation as an act of ministry in itself — care, not administrative inconvenience — and honours the translator's role.
Colonial frame / colonial lens	Western perspective / Eurocentric view	Explicitly names the political origin of the perspective rather than softening it to geography or culture.
Cultural assimilation and land displacement centre	Boarding school	Explicitly names the intention of the institutions: to eradicate the culture of indigenous people sent there and to 'free up' the land for exploitation by European settlers.

A Living Document

This glossary is not fixed. Language is a living practice, and this document will grow as we continue to listen — to people living with the legacy of enslavement, to our Friends in the Caribbean, across the continent of Africa, the Western Hemisphere and Abya Yala, and to the Spirit that guides us. We welcome additions, challenges, and corrections.

If you choose to join us on this journey, we welcome you.

Key – terms agreed by RWG, terms currently under review

Language as Reparative Practice

Paper 6 — Britain Yearly Meeting Reparation Working Group — Summary

Four animating principles

Name what was done, not what people became.	Enslavement is something imposed; “slave” erases the act and fixes an identity. Process words restore humanity.
Name the crime, not the commerce.	“The trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic” centres the criminal act; “transatlantic chattel slavery” frames it as trade.
Name the living present, not the historical past.	People are not “descendants of slaves” — they are living with a legacy: inherited trauma, systemic racism, and the ongoing absence of generational wealth.
Name the frame, not just the fact.	Who sets the agenda, which language is used, whose place-names are spoken — none of this is neutral. Naming the frame opens the possibility of redistribution.

Key terms in current use

Use	Instead of	Because
Enslavement	Slavery / being a slave	Foregrounds an act done to a person, not a fixed identity
Enslaved person	Slave	Restores humanity; the condition was imposed, not intrinsic
The trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic	Transatlantic chattel slavery / the slave trade	Names the crime and its perpetrators; ‘trade’ frames atrocity as commerce
People living with a legacy of enslavement	Descendants of slaves	Captures present-tense, all-encompassing reality: trauma, racism, inequity, absence of generational wealth
Turtle Island	North America / USA, Canada, and Greenland	Translated into English and used by some Indigenous peoples of the North of the Western Hemisphere ; avoids imposing a colonial frame on the land and its peoples
Abya Yala	Latin / South America	Guna/Chibchan Indigenous name for the Southern and Central Western Hemisphere
Joint endeavour / joint enterprise	Partnership (in religious or cross-cultural contexts)	‘Partnership’ implies equality that may not yet exist; joint endeavour invites honest renegotiation
Colonial languages	English, French, Spanish, Portuguese used without comment	Acknowledges that languages of dialogue carry embedded power; names them so we can question them

Terms proposed for adoption

Proposed term	Replaces	Why
Reparative dialogue	Reconciliation / reparations conversation	Centres active repair; signals dialogue itself is part of the reparative work
Agenda-holding	Leadership / chairing	Makes visible who controls what is discussed, opening space to redistribute that power
Language-of-welcome	Common / working language	Shifts the question from efficiency to hospitality: whose language welcomes, and whose excludes?
Ministry in translation	Translated ministry / interpretation	Reframes translation as ministry: care, not administrative inconvenience
Colonial frame / colonial lens	Western / Eurocentric perspective	Explicitly names the political origin of the perspective rather than softening it to geography
Cultural assimilation and land displacement centre	Boarding school	Names the institution’s purpose: eradicate indigenous culture and free the land for colonial exploitation

This is a living document. Language will grow as we continue to listen — to people living with the legacy, to Friends across Africa, the Caribbean, Turtle Island and Abya Yala, and to the Spirit that guides us.

Key – terms agreed by RWG, terms currently under review



Suggested Dates for RWG Meetings in 2027

Reparation Working Group

<i>This section helps Quakers in Britain to measure our impact. It should be completed by the author of the paper.</i>	
Author:	Ann Morgan
Date:	03/07/2026
Submitted to:	Reparation Working Group
Purpose of report:	For decision / regular reporting / other
Background: <i>This paper proposes dates for meetings of the Reparation Working Group to agree on</i>	
Questions to be considered by the committee:	• Can we agree that the proposed meetings are acceptable?

MONTHS	Meeting Date/s	Type and location	Duration	Notes
2027				
January	<i>Friday 22 & Saturday 23</i>	Hybrid VENUE TBC	1.5 days 14.00 – 17.00 & 10.00 – 17.00	Preparation for YM 20 February Acknowledgement & 2nd draft Apology. Paper on Book of Discipline
February	Britain Yearly Meeting Saturday 20	Hybrid Friends House	1 day	Acknowledgement. Prepared ministry on Conference. Apology?
March	<i>Saturday 13</i>	On - line	1 day 10.00 – 12.00 & 15.00 – 17.00	May have Special Interest Mtg between 20 – 26 March. Review laying down plan.
April	<i>Thursday 22</i>	Online	.5 day 14.00- 17.00	May need prep for May 1st YM Agree Apology if not in February
May	Britain Yearly Meeting Saturday 01	Hybrid Friends House	1 day	Apology if not in February
June	<i>Thursday 03</i>	Online	.5 day from 10.00 – 13.00	Plan Groups Fair Stall or July YM Review Laying Down Plan
July	Saturday 10 Yearly Meeting Sat 24- 28 Wed	Online Hybrid ? Hull University	1 day 10.00 – 12.00 & 15.00 – 17.00 5 days	Prep for FWCC Meeting 29 Sept – 03 Oct. 1st Draft of Final Report to Trustees Book of Discipline
August				
September	Thursday 09 FWCC Plenary 29 – 03 Oct	Online Online	.5 day from 14.00 – 17.00 5 Days	Review redraft of final report for Trustees. Review laying down plan. Sowing the Seeds of Justice
October	Saturday 16 APPG TBC	Online Hybrid @ FH	1 day 10.00 – 17.00 1 day	Preparation for closure. Final draft of report for Trustees
November	Thursday 18 Yearly Meeting Saturday 20	Online Hybrid Friends House	.5 day from 10.00 – 13.00 1 day	Finalise handing over process.
December	Saturday 18	VENUE TBC outside London	1 day	Finalise handing over and Party

NB: We need to discern a 1st draft of an apology in December 2026 if only the structure.

Ann Morgan

03/07/2026



Separated Minutes from QWRC

Reparation Working Group

This section helps Quakers in Britain to measure our impact. It should be completed by the author of the paper.

Date: 27/06/2026

Submitted to: Reparation Working Group

Purpose of report: **Receive separated minutes from QWRC**

Background:

These papers were sent to the RWG from QWRC

Quaker World Relations Committee

Held online by zoom videoconference on Saturday 27 June 2026

QWRC 2026-06-12 FWCC World Office Matters

We have received paper **QWRC 2026 06 12** which is the recent statement issued by FWCC Trustees on 29 May in relation to the FWCC Online Global Conference: Sowing the Seeds of Justice from 29 September to 3 October 2027.

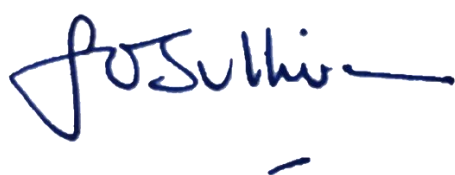
This online gathering in 2027 essentially supports the enactment of commitments made at the FWCC World Plenary Meeting in 2024.

Yearly Meetings are asked to consider three queries ahead of the 2027 Global Online:

<https://fwcc.world/sowing-seeds-of-justice-queries-for-2027-globalonline-conference-confirmed/>

We forward this minute to Quaker Peace & Social Witness, Agenda Planning Committee, and Reparation Working Group, for consideration in their work in advance of the 2027 Online Gathering.

Finola O'Sullivan

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'f O'Sullivan', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Clerk

To; Agenda Planning Committee
 Reparation Working Group
 Quaker Peace & Social Witness

QWRC 2026-06-03 Reparations Working Group (RWG)

We have received papers QWRC 2026 03a and 03b, the minutes from the recent meetings of the Reparations Working Group. Susan Seymour has spoken to these. RWG is preparing for a short contribution at YM in July in Manchester, and some time again in November and during 2027. The group is currently moving into a phase of reporting back to Yearly Meeting and offering recommendations. Their work as RWG may be finished by the end of 2027, but the reparation work of British Quakers will continue. We can learn from other churches. The Church of Scotland issued an apology in May, and there was a recent encyclical from Pope Leo. In March there was a resolution proposed by Ghana to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) which passed.

We are reminded also about care in our use of language e.g. using 'enslaved' rather than 'slave' and using 'trafficking' rather than 'trade'. Woodbrooke courses on the topic of reparation continue, and there will be a conference about RWG historical and theoretical research on 23 October 2026.

We commend the work of RWG in moving British Friends forward in reparation work and making ourselves trustworthy in relation to those living in the legacy of British colonialism around the world. We are advised that any of our Area Meetings can invite a RWG speaker to join them at a future time.

We thank Susan Seymour for her time with us today and send her a copy of this minute, at her request.



Reporting from Racial Justice Network session

Reparation Working Group

This section helps Quakers in Britain to measure our impact. It should be completed by the author of the paper.

Author: Esta Nyeko-Lacek, Rita Remi-Judah, Ann Morgan

Date: 03/07/2026

Submitted to: Reparation Working Group

Purpose of report: Reporting from RJN session

Background:

These are the questions we shared with the Racial Justice Network during our meeting in early June. The responses were drafted by Esta Nyeko-Lacek and were updated to incorporate the feedback provided by members of the Racial Justice Network during that discussion.

Reparation, Justice & the Quaker Community

Reflections in Response to Four Questions

Question 1

My ancestors were not plantation owners or direct beneficiaries of the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic. They were poor coal miners, Irish labourers, working-class people, immigrants, people who experienced religious persecution, or others who experienced poverty, discrimination, and exploitation.

More broadly, many groups throughout history have suffered severe hardship, including bonded labourers, industrial workers, and impoverished communities across England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and elsewhere.

Given that history, why should the issue of reparation for the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic matter to me?

Reparation is about systemic injustice, not personal guilt

Reparation is not about assigning personal blame or individual guilt. Rather, it is about recognising collective responsibility and addressing the lasting impacts of historical injustices.

You may not have personally caused harm, and your ancestors may not have directly held or trafficked enslaved people. They may themselves have experienced exclusion, exploitation, or discrimination. Yet reparation asks us to look beyond individual family histories and consider the wider systems that shaped society.

Many people in Britain were connected to and benefited from the economy created by enslavement and colonialism, whether through trade, manufacturing, shipping, finance, insurance, taxation, or employment. Even those who were poor often lived within a society whose institutions and economic development were strengthened by wealth extracted through enslavement and colonisation.

Inheritance is not only through bloodlines

When people hear the word “inheritance,” they often think of property or wealth passed down through families. However, we also inherit societies.

We inherit traditions, institutions, laws, infrastructure, educational systems, cultural assumptions, and economic structures built by previous generations. We inherit both the benefits and the burdens of the societies into which we are born.

Reparation concerns not only familial inheritance but societal inheritance. Even if our ancestors were not wealthy or powerful, we participate in institutions and systems shaped by historical processes. Likewise, many descendants of enslaved people continue to live with the consequences of systems that denied their ancestors wealth, opportunity, land, citizenship, and human dignity.

Shared benefits and shared responsibilities

The wealth generated through enslavement and colonial exploitation played a significant role in the development of Britain's economy. Profits helped finance industries, infrastructure, banks, universities, museums, hospitals, and other institutions whose benefits continue into the present.

This does not mean that everyone benefited equally, nor that all British people were prosperous. It does mean that modern society was shaped by these historical processes and that we collectively inherit their outcomes.

If we accept collective responsibility for preserving institutions we inherit, there is also a case for accepting collective responsibility for addressing the harms that those institutions helped create.

Ongoing inequalities

The effects of enslavement did not end with abolition. Systems of racial hierarchy developed to justify enslavement continued through colonial rule, segregation, exclusion, and discrimination.

As a result, inequalities in wealth, health, education, political power, and opportunity remain linked to histories of enslavement and colonialism in many parts of the world.

Reparation seeks to address these continuing consequences rather than simply revisit the past.

Acknowledging one group's suffering does not diminish another's

The suffering of coal miners, Irish labourers, religious minorities, and other working-class communities is historically important and deserves recognition; we can acknowledge people's own histories of hardship without diminishing others.

Acknowledging the harms of the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic does not require ignoring those experiences. Different forms of injustice can coexist, and different historical wrongs may require different forms of remedy.

The purpose of reparation is not to rank suffering or compete over victimhood. Rather, it is to understand how particular injustices continue to shape present-day inequalities.

A shared history of hardship can be used as a bridge to connect.

Experiencing oppression does not prevent people from causing harm – privilege is complex

History is often more complex than a simple division between victims and perpetrators.

People who experienced discrimination or hardship could also participate in systems that oppressed others. Experiencing injustice does not automatically prevent someone from benefiting from, supporting, or perpetuating another form of injustice.

We know that white people have varied class and historical experiences; however, whiteness still carries systemic power, and racism is able to continue because of these structures. This complexity can be seen in aspects of Quaker history.

For example:

- Some Quakers established a colony on land violently taken from the Lenape Nation and called it New Jersey.
- Prominent Quakers, including William Penn, were involved in colonial projects that became part of wider settler-colonial expansion.
- Colonisation was encouraged by the state to increase white Christian settlement and support the economic development of colonies. This ingrained violent racial hierarchies in the colonies.
- Some white Quakers who experienced persecution in Britain later participated in colonial economies that relied upon enslaved labour.
- Economic incentives were provided within colonial systems for the transportation and exploitation of enslaved Africans.

The history is neither simple nor uniform. Quakers also played an important role in abolitionist movements and later struggles for justice. Nevertheless, the fact that some Quakers experienced discrimination themselves did not prevent them from becoming involved in systems that harmed others.

This reminds us that suffering and complicity can exist together. These conversations are difficult, but we can help each other.

Engaging seriously with reparation

Meaningful discussions begin with recognising that reparation is not primarily about assigning guilt to individuals for the actions of their ancestors. It is about understanding how societies inherit the consequences of past systems and asking what responsibilities arise from that inheritance.

The central question is not: *“Was my family to blame?”*

Rather, it is: *“What responsibilities do we have, as inheritors of our society, towards harms whose consequences continue into the present?”*

These questions require holding both emotional reasoning and logical responses. This is needed in order for transformation.

Question 2

As Quakers, many of us are deeply concerned about present-day injustices: the treatment of asylum seekers, climate change, and modern forms of enslavement and exploitation. Should we not focus our attention on these current issues rather than on historical injustices?

Many Quakers recognise that climate change, poverty, displacement, and exploitation are not simply the result of individual choices. They are shaped by decisions, systems, and institutions built over generations.

The people who created those systems may no longer be alive, but their consequences remain with us.

Reparative justice raises a similar question: what responsibility do societies have for harms whose effects continue long after the original injustice has ended?

Present-day concerns and historical concerns are connected

It is not a simple either-or choice.

Climate change, forced migration, racial inequality, economic exclusion, and modern-day enslavement did not emerge in isolation. Many of the systems that shape today's injustices have roots in enslavement, colonialism, and the economic models that grew from them.

Understanding these connections can help us respond more effectively to contemporary injustice.

Enslavement and climate injustice

The plantation economies built through enslaved labour were based on the extraction of maximum profit from both people and land.

Forests were cleared, ecosystems transformed, soils exhausted, and landscapes reshaped to serve export economies. The same logic that treated human beings as commodities often treated land and natural resources as limitless sources of wealth to be exploited.

The modern patterns of resource extraction, environmental degradation, and unequal vulnerability to climate change have roots in colonial economic systems. Wealth accumulated through the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic and empire helped fuel industrial development, while many formerly colonised regions continue to bear disproportionate environmental burdens today.

Climate justice therefore involves not only reducing future harm but also recognising how historical systems created unequal responsibilities and unequal vulnerabilities.

Intersectionality: enslavement, colonialism, and the treatment of asylum seekers

Many people seeking asylum today are fleeing conflict, instability, poverty, environmental crises, or economic conditions – many of which are linked to histories of colonialism and global inequality.

The racial ideas developed to justify enslavement and colonial rule helped establish racialised hierarchies that continue to shape attitudes towards migration, borders, belonging, and citizenship.

At the same time, wealthy nations often seek to protect the advantages accumulated through centuries of global economic inequality while restricting access to those displaced by its consequences.

This does not mean that every current-day migration issue can be explained by the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic or colonialism. However, it does invite us to consider an intersectional approach to these issues and how historical systems continue to shape who is vulnerable, who is welcomed, and who is excluded.

Enslavement and modern-day enslavement

Modern-day enslavement differs from the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic, but there are also similarities.

Many forms of forced labour today are embedded within global supply chains that depend upon finding the cheapest possible labour and shifting social costs onto vulnerable populations.

People are often driven into exploitation by poverty, debt, displacement, conflict, or lack of alternatives. These conditions are frequently connected to global inequalities that were shaped by centuries of colonial extraction and unequal economic development.

The idea that profit can be prioritised over human dignity did not begin with modern-day enslavement, nor did it end with the abolition of the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic.

Understanding the history of enslavement can help us recognise how exploitative systems adapt and persist in new forms.

Reparation is forward-looking

It can be understood as a forward-looking process that includes truth-telling, education, relationship-building, institutional reform, and addressing inequalities that persist in the present.

The aim is not to remain trapped in the past, but to understand how the past continues to shape the world we live in and to respond accordingly, as past and present injustices are deeply connected.

The same moral principles apply

When Quakers advocate for asylum seekers, climate justice, or action against modern-day enslavement, we often do so because we believe that people and institutions have responsibilities towards those harmed by systems from which others have benefited.

We recognise that justice sometimes requires more than sympathy. It may require acknowledgement, repair, redistribution, or structural change.

If we believe that today's societies have responsibilities to address the long-term consequences of environmental destruction, displacement, exploitation, and systemic injustice, on what grounds should the long-term consequences of the trafficking and enslavement of Africans across the Atlantic be treated differently?

Question 3

How would a transformed Quaker community look different from the church as it is today through our work on reparation?

Greater humility and the ability to tell the truth

It would be a community with a deeper, more honest understanding of itself – a community that has grappled with the ways it has failed to live up to its own spiritual values and testimonies, and that is actively seeking to repair that gap.

This transformation would begin with truth-telling. Friends would collectively acknowledge histories of harm that have previously been obscured or minimised. As a result, the burden of holding and articulating this history would no longer fall primarily on Black and Brown Friends. Instead, there would be shared responsibility across the community to understand, name, and respond to that history. (This would also mark a clear movement toward becoming an actively anti-racist church, rather than one that aspires to equality in principle but struggles in practice.)

Decolonisation

Through this work, the community would more clearly identify and address its present-day limitations, including those rooted in unacknowledged power dynamics, inherited narratives, and colonial assumptions. A decolonial lens would shape how Friends understand both the past and the present, including asking critical questions about agency: who tells the story, who holds power, and whose experiences are centred.

Embracing complexity and discomfort

The process itself would be transformative. By grappling with the complexity of the coexistence of harm and faithfulness, oppression and resistance, Friends would develop a more truthful and mature understanding of Quaker history and identity.

This includes recognising that, at different times and in different ways, individuals and communities may have been victims, perpetrators, or actors for justice, often shaped by their position and privilege.

This reckoning would not be quick or easy; it would require sitting with discomfort, tension, and the slow unravelling of familiar narratives. The work would not be “finished” – it would be a continual, ongoing process.

Friends would become more open to hearing from others, able to hold difficult truths, and more willing to listen without defensiveness. There would be a growing awareness that histories of oppression and privilege are not distant or abstract but

are lived realities that continue within and around us. The past would no longer be treated as something separate or objectified, but as something we carry and must take responsibility for in the present.

Culture of openness

Relationships within the Quaker community and globally would also be reshaped. We would be able to honestly name inequalities in joint endeavours with Quakers abroad, particularly those in contexts shaped by colonial histories and ongoing injustice. Friends would work towards more equitable relationships. This would include greater accountability, and attention to how resources, decision-making, and voice are shared.

There would be a more explicit recognition of power dynamics within meetings and structures. Friends would remain attentive to who is being heard, who is being overlooked, and how identity and context shape the risks associated with speaking up. The community would actively work to create conditions where people can participate without being retraumatised and where existing inequalities are not reinforced.

New practices and shared responsibility for growth

A transformed community would also develop new ways of being together. Friends would prepare collectively for difficult conversations, recognising the need for care and intention. They would no longer rely on Black and Brown participants to educate others but would take shared responsibility for learning and growth. Harm, when it occurs, would be named and addressed rather than avoided. Friends would have stronger relationships and greater knowledge as a result.

Spiritually resilient community

Ultimately, the community would be more spiritually resilient and grounded. It would have developed the capacity to hold complexity, to remain in relationship through discomfort, and to live more fully into Quaker testimonies of truth, equality, and justice. This transformation would not be a finished state but an ongoing process — one rooted in honesty, humility, and collective responsibility.

We would be able to answer:

- **Are we truly “Friends” to all?**
- **Do we recognise our biases?**
- **Do we listen to all experiences of racism and microaggressions?**

Question 4

How would we engage with people who are unconvinced? Do we go to them, do they come to us? How can we engage people in coming on this journey?

Embed the work in familiar contexts

Embedding this work in familiar contexts helps make reparation more accessible. It can be integrated into areas that people already understand, such as climate justice, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work, and approaches rooted in truth, repair, and healing justice. Creating spaces for engagement, such as reading groups and discussion forums, can support people to engage in ways that feel approachable.

Tend to the difficult emotions

It is essential to acknowledge and address the emotional responses that this work involves. Engaging with reparation can bring up resistance, particularly when it involves confronting and potentially relinquishing forms of privilege. It can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, or defensiveness. Supporting people through this process means helping them move beyond these reactions toward accountability and deeper understanding. This includes building the capacity to sit with discomfort rather than avoid it. A “head and heart” approach is crucial here: intellectual understanding must be paired with emotional engagement. People need support to build their capacity to remain present with feelings of shame, complexity, and unease.

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares speaks to this.

The Parable of the Weeds

²⁴ *Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.*

²⁵ *But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.*

²⁶ *When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.*

²⁷ *“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’*

²⁸ *“An enemy did this,” he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’*

^{29–30} *“No,” he answered, “because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”*

We cannot simply rip out and ignore what is harmful — what is harmful is not always seen at the outset. The parable of the wheat and the tares resonates deeply with our work: it was not definitively known at the outset what was wheat and what was weed (tare) — they looked the same. It was only later, upon reflection and after the passage of time, that a clearer view was discerned. We take from this that if we avoid addressing problems, they will persist and become pervasive. We must be able to sit with difficult realities and tend to both the harm and healing simultaneously, repeatedly, relentlessly.

Expand understandings of privilege and harm

Support people to develop a deeper understanding of privilege and harm. This includes exploring different forms of privilege and capital — for example, social, financial, and institutional.

Reparation is not just about the money

Those new to the concept may not understand that reparation is not just about money. While financial compensation is important, the work also looks at repairing relationships and addressing collective and intergenerational trauma. Reparation is not about believing past harms can simply be ‘paid off.’ Instead, reparation is much broader. It recognises that the systems shaping our economic, political, cultural, and social realities are recent and not inevitable, and it opens up real ways of imagining and building different, fairer alternatives.

Tailor approaches to different people

It is important to tailor approaches to different people, recognising that individuals may be at very different stages in their understanding or acceptance of the issues. This means considering how unconvinced someone may be and adapting the way you engage with them accordingly. A range of approaches can be helpful, meeting people where they are while still inviting them to reflect more deeply.

Build hope

Central to this work is the need to build hope. This involves nurturing the hopeful emotions that come from imagining a more just future, and encouraging a sense that meaningful change is both possible and necessary. For those living with the ongoing impacts of harm, it is especially important to affirm that they do not have to accept the ‘bare minimum,’ but can seek something more.

Hear from those living within the legacies of harm

The voices of those with lived experience are particularly powerful in this context. We should make sure they are heard. Stories from people directly affected — those who continue to carry these legacies in their bodies and everyday lives — can create empathy and genuine connection. These narratives often help move people beyond feelings of guilt and towards a deeper sense of solidarity and willingness to act. They also offer important insight and teach us about what it means to live with the enduring legacies of past Quaker actions, helping to guide more informed, grounded responses.

Reparation and the *Religious Society of Friends*

Prepared for Quaker meeting discussion on the trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic, inheritance, and collective responsibility. **Four questions, one continuing journey.**

WHERE WE BEGIN

Reparation is not about assigning personal guilt for the actions of ancestors — it is about understanding how societies inherit the consequences of past systems, and asking what responsibilities arise from that inheritance, now.

1

“My ancestors weren’t plantation owners — why should this matter to me?”

Systemic injustice, not personal guilt

- **Inheritance runs wider than bloodlines.** We inherit societies — their institutions, infrastructure, and assumptions — not just family wealth.
- Profits from enslavement and colonialism financed industries, banks, universities, and hospitals whose benefits continue today.
- If we accept responsibility for the institutions we inherit, that includes responsibility for the harms those institutions helped create.
- Inequalities in wealth, health, and opportunity remain linked to these histories — reparations address continuing consequences, not just the past.
- One group’s hardship — coal miners, Irish labourers, the persecuted — doesn’t cancel another’s. Suffering isn’t a competition; privilege and harm can coexist, as Quaker history itself shows.

3

“What would a transformed Quaker community look like?”

Humility, decolonisation, shared weight

- **Truth-telling becomes shared work** — the burden no longer falls on Black and Brown Friends alone.
- A decolonial lens questions who tells the story, who holds power, who is centred.
- Comfort with complexity: people can be, at different times, harmed and complicit, faithful and falling short.
- Greater accountability in relationships with Friends abroad — naming inequality honestly rather than past it.
- Not a finished state, but an ongoing practice rooted in honesty and collective responsibility.

2

“Shouldn’t we focus on today’s injustices — asylum, climate, modern slavery?”

Past and present are one inquiry

- Plantation economies treated land and people alike as resources to extract from — a logic still visible in climate injustice today.
- Racial hierarchies built to justify enslavement still shape who is welcomed and who is excluded at today’s borders.
- Modern forced labour runs on the same underlying premise: profit prioritised over human dignity.
- **Reparation is forward-looking** — truth-telling, relationship-building, and institutional reform aimed at the world we live in now.

4

“How do we engage people who are unconvinced?”

Meet people where they stand

- Anchor the work in familiar ground — climate justice, EDI, healing justice — through reading groups and open discussion.
- Tend to guilt, shame, and defensiveness directly; pair head and heart, intellect with emotional capacity.
- Reparation is broader than money — it is repaired relationships and reimagined alternatives.
- Centre those living with the legacies of harm: lived experience builds solidarity faster than guilt does.
- **Build hope.** People shouldn’t have to settle for the bare minimum.

THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND THE WEEDS — MATTHEW 13

The servants ask to pull up the weeds at once. The owner says wait — let both grow together until harvest, lest the wheat be uprooted with them.

At the outset, wheat and weed looked the same; only time and reflection told them apart. We cannot simply rip out what seems harmful before we understand it — but neither can we leave it unaddressed. We tend to harm and healing together, repeatedly, relentlessly.

QUAKER HISTORY, COMPLICATED

“Some Quakers experienced persecution in Britain — and later took part in colonial economies built on enslaved labour.”

Suffering and complicity can exist together. Quakers were also central to abolition. The history is neither simple nor uniform.

A TRANSFORMED COMMUNITY WOULD BE ABLE TO ANSWER

- ? Are we truly “Friends” to all?
- ? Do we recognise our biases?
- ? Do we listen to all experiences of racism and microaggressions?

“Not: was my family to blame? — but: what do we, as inheritors, owe?”