

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

At the Yearly Meeting in London at Friends House and online,
26 July to 30 July 2024

Substantive Minutes

Friday 26 July: 19:00–21:00, Yearly Meeting Session 1

Minute 26: Words from YP@YM

We have heard from YP@YM, our Friends aged 11–15:

"On Saturday morning, during our theme session with Zephyr, we considered deeply how we can love those who do bad things, some of us aided by the Swarthmore lecture. This was a question that we struggled to answer. We were helped by remembering that loving someone is not the same as liking someone. We thought it was very difficult but powerful to live a truthful and loving life.

Love is what keeps us going and heals all wounds. It dictates our day to day. We considered Pandora's box from the view of living authentically. If we do not live authentically, we cannot love truly and deeply, as we hold ourselves back. Opening the box and being honest allows us to offer much more. The power of pacifists comes from speaking truth in a loving way. If we don't do this, the world can be a hurtful place, without understanding.

We talked about love as an action, not a feeling. A useful example was how we can meaningfully say sorry to someone we love even if we don't feel loving towards them at that moment."

Minute 27: Speaking and Living with Integrity

We have spent time with the question: do Friends at Yearly Meeting, or those who read a Yearly Meeting minute, hear it as a call to personal or collective action?

We recognise the tension: as individuals we need to use our energies wisely and cannot each do everything. However, in uniting with a Yearly Meeting minute and upholding each other's work prompted by the Spirit, we can, as a community of Friends, find ways to do all that we are called to do.

Each one of us must hear the words of a Yearly Meeting minute as an invitation to stand in the spirit that inspired Christ, inspired the gospels, and inspired the Yearly Meeting minute, and to be moved in that same spirit in turn.

The word "we" in a Yearly Meeting minute applies not only to the people present in that Meeting; we only widen the circle of "us" by talking to one another and strengthening the connections felt between those Friends who do not or cannot attend Yearly Meeting, with the whole community of Friends in Britain. We need to spend due time in our Local and Area Meetings considering Yearly Meeting minutes, what we as a Local or Area Meeting might do and what we as individuals might do. Our time at Yearly Meeting can revive energy in our local Quaker communities to look again at commitments we have previously made.

We have heard some examples of how Meetings and other bodies of Friends have been inspired to reflection and action by our Yearly Meeting minutes on the ever-worsening climate emergency, on climate justice, on anti-racism and on affirming and welcoming transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse Friends. This meeting asks our staff to explore what can be done to ensure that minutes on these and other important matters are easy to find.

Quaker Meetings can be a space where each of us can be authentically ourselves. This can be a driver of an individualistic feel, ploughing our own furrows. When we are in true community, when we know one another and belong to one another and to God, we can build trust in our Friends to strengthen our work on ourselves and on the world.

We cannot know the long-term impact of a Yearly Meeting minute when we make it. Some minutes made years, decades or centuries ago are doing tangible good in the world and in Friends' lives today. This can be true of minutes that feel very much "of the moment" when they are made, as well as declarations of principle.

It is a great responsibility to discern in community what the Great Creator is leading us to do. In that discernment, each of us can learn from others and support them in the work that we cannot do ourselves. God's work is where your deep joy meets the deep hunger of the world.

Monday 29 July, 14:30–17:30: Yearly Meeting Session 6**Minute 29: Minute from Junior Yearly Meeting 2024**

We have received and heard read a minute from Junior Yearly Meeting (Friends aged 15–18).

"How can we nurture love in our actions?"

We have considered this theme to find out what love means to us and how we can demonstrate it. The question of how to bridge between the feeling and the enactment of love brought us to the thought that love begins with oneself.

To release our love into the world we must first fill the jug from which we pour: love and care for ourselves fundamentally enables us to love others. From a position of self-acceptance, we find the capacity to connect with the light in others. This returns us to our innately loving state. Such relationships are the birthplace of universal compassion.

As a JYM community we found belonging, connection and an environment in which vulnerability allowed us to share truth. We experienced an abundance of love, propelling a desire to love in the face of injustice. To love, love and keep on loving.

Over the course of the event, we have held in our minds those experiencing hate and wish for a peaceful world with the belonging we have felt here. We believe love is an action. Ultimately, this gives us our instruction: to nurture love and find that of god within us all."

Minute 30: Truth and Integrity in Public Life

We have continued our consideration of Truth and Integrity in public life, introduced at Yearly Meeting 2023. How can we encourage a culture of integrity in media and politics? How can we support others, in the wider world and in our own community, to feel safe, strong and brave? How do we find kinder ground on which to disagree, and enable a shared quest for truth?

Our meeting recognises that politicians are under huge pressure and this can lead to temptation towards binary choices. We too often equate politics with confrontation and it is hard to step away from the desire to win. Following this year's General Election, we have an opportunity to reset, to engage with Members of Parliament who are new, not only to their constituency, but to the workings of parliament.

When we see politicians of any party acting with truth and integrity we should thank them for their honesty and to encourage others to do the same. This encourages those serving in political positions to aim higher, and is one way towards the kinder ground we seek.

We are reminded to consider where the politicians of tomorrow are coming from and the world they are growing up in. We must look to ourselves and our standards of truth, integrity and transparency. If they grow up seeing truth and integrity as admirable, and normalised and expected, the future can be changed.

It can be tempting to avoid conflict in expressing our opinions, but we need to find kinder ground for disagreement among Quakers and in the wider world. Everything we do should come out of love for ourselves, and for others including those we disagree with.

The questions before us are at root about our testimonies: about humility, recognising that every moment involves peace and violence in interaction, and being present in that dance.

Minute 31: Continuing our work on Quaker structures

This session began with minutes and communications from other groups discerning within our Yearly Meeting.

"Fox Cubs (Friends aged 3–6) explored change and recognised that it comes throughout our lives. Some things can change. Some changes don't make us happy."

Junior Yearly Meeting has held a discussion session in which they considered the proposed experiment of a continuing Yearly Meeting. The report from their session reads:

"Overall there was agreement that the proposal to merge Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting seemed to them to be a good way forward to clarify and simply how our governance works."

We have received and heard a minute from the Spiritual Adventurers (Friends aged 9–11):

"Residential Quaker gatherings offer good opportunities to get to know one another. These are good for meeting friends from around the world. For shorter gatherings we think two days is best and some of us like sleeping in our own beds. Longer gatherings give us time to have more exploration / experience.

Gatherings are tiring and it would be ideal if we didn't have school the following day.

We want lots of day events together."

We agree to proceed with the proposals brought to us by the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings, and endorsed by Meeting for Sufferings, to move to a continuing Yearly Meeting.

We have heard excitement about this as an adventurous way forward. We have also heard that a continuing Yearly Meeting will be easier to communicate to a wider group of Friends than the current arrangements and provide more opportunity for Friends involved in Quaker Recognised Bodies and a wider range of groups and communities to play their part in our Spirit-led discernment.

We recognise we will all need to commit to these proposals to make them successful.

We hold in the light those who are feeling a sense of loss about elements of a structure that some have been involved in for many years.

It is gifted to us that we sit together to know the will of God. We hope that these changes will bring more opportunities to see one another's faces and grow as a community in the spirit.

We have heard that there are risks associated with moving forward with these changes, and risks associated with staying as we are. We are not afraid of the risks in moving forward but wary of them and recognise the need to manage them. We are excited by the potential future where we are each challenged to step up and be more accountable, radical and adventurous.

As we move forward in faith, we are clear that implementation of these plans for a continuing Yearly Meeting will need to:

- In all things, keep the focus on Spirit-led discernment and seek to maximise the time available for this.
- Include financial arrangements that can support individuals to attend Yearly Meeting, and find ways to support Area Meetings who need help with the costs of representatives' attendance.
- Ensure sufficient financial resources are available to support the continuing Yearly Meeting.
- Look afresh at the process for planning and arranging our time together, experimenting with different ways of working that will not place an excessive burden on those we ask to take responsibility for these tasks.
- Plan for residential Yearly Meetings from time to time.
- Consider what clerking arrangements would best suit the different pattern of meetings.
- Work out what processes we need to ensure that minutes received from Area Meetings can be properly seasoned and tested.
- Consider whether and how the historic name "Meeting for Sufferings" might be used within the context of a continuing Yearly Meeting.
- Ensure that our Yearly Meeting sessions and preparation materials include opportunities for Friends to learn more about our Quaker business method, as well as how our structures work.
- Collect and act on feedback received after every Yearly Meeting session.
- Set up a process for a more formal review at a fixed time once sufficient sessions have been held.
- Ensure that no Friend bears undue responsibility or power; and encourage Friends to whom power may flow to continually push it back towards the body of Friends.

We expect to minute more detail on the practical next steps tomorrow.

Tuesday 30 July, 9:30–12:30: Yearly Meeting Session 7**Minute 37: Preparatory steps towards the change to continuing Yearly Meeting sessions**

We have returned to the issue of changes to our structures to consider the next steps required.

We expect to start holding sessions of a continuing Yearly Meeting after the rise of the Yearly Meeting session already called for 1–4 May 2026. Meeting for Sufferings will continue to meet until that time, after which it will be laid down in its current form and its functions transferred to Yearly Meeting unless otherwise delegated.

Yesterday we noted a wish to look afresh at the process for planning and arranging our time together, experimenting with different ways of working. We are clear that our new arrangements must neither impose too heavy a workload on, nor give too much power to any Friend or committee. The committee responsible for planning the agenda and those responsible for clerking our Yearly Meeting sessions could become overworked or overly influential and we must be careful to support them appropriately to avoid this happening.

In preparation for the continuing Yearly Meeting sessions, we agree the following.

Agenda planning

We ask our existing Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee to continue working to plan the Yearly Meeting sessions already called for May 2025 and May 2026.

We expect to appoint a new single agenda committee to arrange all Yearly Meeting sessions to be held after May 2026. We recognise that this body will need time to prepare, develop new processes and ways of working, and therefore agree that it will need to start work after Yearly Meeting 2025 ahead of the new arrangements to begin in summer 2026. For a time, therefore, we will have two agenda committees working in parallel: the existing Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, and a new single agenda committee.

We ask the Recording Clerk to prepare and lay before Meeting for Sufferings in December 2024 terms of reference for the new single agenda committee to take responsibility after Yearly Meeting in May 2026. Drawing on the experience of recent and current clerks of Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings, these terms of reference should also propose a mechanism for the appointment of a clerking team for the new single agenda committee and the continuing Yearly Meeting in a way which will not place an excessive burden on those we ask to take responsibility for these tasks.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to adopt these draft terms of reference in principle so that nominations may be sought before the terms of reference are finally laid before Yearly Meeting in session in 2025 for adoption.

We ask Central Nominations Committee to add nominations to the new single agenda committee to the Schedule of Nominations already agreed by minute 10 of this Yearly Meeting and to bring nominations in line with the draft terms of reference to Yearly Meeting in 2025, bearing in mind that some continuity with the existing Yearly Meeting

Agenda Committee will be helpful. This will allow the necessary preparatory work in planning future Yearly Meeting sessions to be undertaken.

The new single agenda committee should report to Yearly Meeting in session at least once each year on its work.

In the future an important function of the new agenda committee will be to receive and consider minutes from Area Meetings and other bodies to be laid before the Yearly Meeting as a whole for discernment. In many cases these minutes will need seasoning and testing before being forwarded for receipt at a Yearly Meeting session. We ask the new agenda committee, once appointed, to work with the clerks of Meeting for Sufferings and others to propose a mechanism for this to happen well, which may well involve other bodies. We ask the new agenda committee to bring a report on this to Yearly Meeting in May 2026.

We ask the new single agenda committee also to consider how to ensure that our Yearly Meeting sessions and preparation materials include opportunities for Friends to learn more about our Quaker business method, as well as how our structures work. We also ask them, with staff, to communicate the new arrangements and encourage Friends to attend.

The name 'Meeting for Sufferings'

We have heard the concern that we may lose something important by laying aside completely the name 'Meeting for Sufferings'. We ask the new agenda committee to give consideration to this and to report any proposals to Yearly Meeting in 2026.

Constitutional matters

We note that functions currently performed by Meeting for Sufferings will need to be transferred to Yearly Meeting or formally delegated to another committee.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings, through its Church Government Advisory Group, to bring forward new draft constitutional text, working with the Book of Discipline Revision Committee and the Group to Review Central Structures established by BYM Trustees, as required.

This work should include defining more clearly how representation from area meetings and other bodies, including groupings not currently represented at Meeting for Sufferings, will work, and the role of the representatives so appointed.

Financial matters

We ask BYM Trustees to ensure that sufficient financial resources are always available to enable the continuing Yearly Meeting to be held.

We want Yearly Meeting sessions to be accessible to as many Friends as possible and we committed in 2017 to removing barriers to participation in our structures. With that in mind, we ask BYM Trustees to ensure that the current bursary scheme for individuals attending Yearly Meeting is reviewed and ideally simplified.

We further ask BYM Trustees to propose a system for supporting area meetings and other bodies with the financial costs of representatives' attendance at Yearly Meeting

sessions and to bring a report to Meeting for Sufferings for consideration at its March 2025 meeting.

Calling of Yearly Meeting sessions

We ask Meeting for Sufferings, on the recommendation of the current Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, to agree dates and locations for Yearly Meeting sessions in 2026 (after the sessions in May), 2027 and 2028, noting that we expect to hold residential Yearly Meetings from time to time and regularly to hold meetings in locations other than London. We expect that once these changes are implemented it will be for Yearly Meeting in session to agree the dates and locations of future sessions, on the recommendation of its agenda committee.

Review of new arrangements

We hope that our new arrangements will allow us to be agile and to make small changes as we find they are necessary. In particular, we expect that our new single agenda committee, when appointed, will ensure that feedback is collected after every Yearly Meeting event and appropriate actions are taken as a result.

We also want a formal review of our new arrangements, and ask the new agenda committee to work with staff to prepare a plan and agreed criteria for this. The review should take place no later than five years from the date of the first continuing session.

We note that our minute 31 of our session yesterday also gives guidance to Friends working to take this forward.

We ask that Friends around the country uphold and pray for those whom we have just asked to undertake this work. We also give thanks for the work done over the last years, especially by members of the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings.

Tuesday 30 July, 14:30–16:00: Yearly Meeting Session 8

Minute 39: Words from YP@YM

We receive and have heard words from YP@YM's meeting for worship, on the power of love and truth in public life:

"Sometimes we can find it hard to speak and share and we need places of safety and trust, which shows the power of truth.

Our truth can shake the whole world.

If everyone works together we can make a difference.

On an individual level being able to be truthful about what is happening to us can enable us to share and increase our understanding which can influence wider changes and conversations within society. This shows the healing power of truth.

We have learnt we are enough and that trying to do too much is not possible – our truth and care are no less than others. And that trying to love is not always possible but trying shows we care.

We also know truth can hurt and this is hard. Especially if someone else's truth is not yours.

We know acceptance is hard, and being truthful when it puts at risk being accepted, is difficult. But perhaps sometimes we can welcome opportunities even though it might make us vulnerable."

Minute 47: Receipt of minutes from the Youth, Children and Families Programmes

We have received and heard read a minute from the Children's Programme of this Yearly Meeting as follows, and have seen ministry from these Friends in the form of artwork:

["Children's Programme minute to Britain Yearly Meeting](#)

We are the children of Yearly Meeting 2024, who love animals, sunny days and exploring the world, especially parks.

At Tavistock Square Gardens we made big bubbles and shared games joyfully, like ducking under, prowling over and even popping through the middle of the parachute.

We brought back small things we loved and thought of their message of commitment to a sustainable future.

Sometimes it is hard to discern the truth. Leaves change, our lives change and Quaker communities change. At Yearly Meeting a New Shoot even learned to walk.

Finally we centred down through sand, stories, drawing and labyrinths.

We enjoyed making new Friends.

Please join us in this song ...

"Make new friends, but keep the old.

One is silver and the other gold.""

We have received and heard read a minute from Young People at Yearly Meeting (YP@YM) as follows:

["YP@YM 2024 Minute](#)

In YP@YM we were joined by 23 participants and 6 adults over the course of the weekend, as well as multiple guests, all of whom we were grateful for. We considered our theme – the power of love and truth.

We enjoyed the interactions we shared with the rest of BYM, including the George Fox birthday celebrations, meetings we joined in the Light, the exploration sessions, listening to the Swarthmore Lecture, participating in worship for witness, and the JYM ceilidh.

In our themed sessions we learned about different aspects of showing love and where we find this in our day-to-day actions. We also explored the different meanings of truth and how we can seek it lovingly, and sometimes powerfully, in our lives.

In worship we shared profound ministry often relating to how the theme impacts our own lives and our personal truths. We appreciated the opportunity to explore things that bring us love in guided meditation.

During worship sharing we created a tablecloth covered in drawings of people and things that we love. We used the tablecloth in our fantastic banquet proudly wearing our decorated bonnets as a homage to quaker history – we celebrated the joy and love that comes with sharing food.

We got lots of time to enjoy nature and each other's company on our trips to the park where we played games such as frisbee and skipping, and we had an opportunity to display our creative and collaborative skills when we competed in the base group challenge. Another outing we shared was taking a trip to see the exhibition of Jason and the Adventure of 254 at the Wellcome Collection. We enjoyed a reflective moment in the reading room there too.

Overall, we feel we created a safe and loving community where everyone has felt comfortable living their own truths."

Minute 48: Epistle of Junior Yearly Meeting

We have received and heard read the epistle of Junior Yearly Meeting as follows:

"To all Friends everywhere,

From the 26th to 30th of July 2024, 51 young people from across Britain and further afield gathered at Friends House alongside Britain Yearly Meeting for five days of inward and outward reflection on the theme "How can we nurture love in our actions?"

Full of exciting new prospects, we lived alongside Yearly Meeting, with participants engaging in multiple sessions and enjoying the created space for rare conversations across generations. With new people, a new venue, and new structures a strong community was fostered as we faced new challenges. We were positively affirmed when integrating with wider BYM, with our discussions opening new grounds to explore in the future.

Each day we were embellished with insightful worship. We experienced self-growth in meeting, with many led to share for the first time. In All Together Worship with BYM, we were inspired by ministry comparing a meeting to a calm lake, with contributions like pebbles causing ripples. In some of our meetings there were lots of ripples and we felt unified when we held guided meditation for Yearly Meeting.

Celebrating the 400th birthday of George Fox united us. We felt connected with our past and present, through circle dancing and cake, uniting through our closing singing. Music filled the air at our joyous ceilidh, shared with Young People at Yearly Meeting - a lovely occasion with great height differences.

How can we nurture love in our actions? This theme echoed throughout Junior Yearly Meeting. The Arrangements Committee opened the event, sharing personal experiences on the theme. Participants felt inspired and moved, drawing together ministry that continued throughout the event.

We were grateful for Dave Wiles' speaking of his journey, which was transformed when he attended church and found love, in a deeply powerful and moving session for all. The Quaker Faith in Action team encouraged us to think about non-violent and violent scenarios, with complex philosophical questions arising as we discussed what constitutes violence and what actions we could take within our own communities to assert our desire for change.

Friends held victims of conflicts around the world in the light during our shared Outdoor Witness. Although we were saddened while considering the various different forms of conflict that take place - not just war - we found hope rekindled within us upon hearing the horns of passing cars. A desire for peace is not something confined to Friends.

Ben Jarman, Swarthmore Lecturer challenged both our preconceptions about the people who inhabit our prisons and the systems which control them. As youth we often feel powerless, even within our wider Quaker community, and his emphasis on the "tiny slices of power" that we hold gave a portion back to us.

The connections that we have created here will stay with us for life, affirming our convictions. We have found everyday power in the love we can share, and feel inspired to take this out into the world with us. To find and belong to a group that perceives the world in a multitude of ways is something we find precious, and to come to this event is to never feel alone.

Signed,

Willoughby Densham

Seren Melling

Rosa Keene

Scott Denmead

Junior Yearly Meeting 2024 Arrangements Committee"

Minute 49: General Epistle

Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting

Held in Friends House and online from 26 to 30 July 2024

Dear Friends everywhere, we send you our love and greetings.

Gyfeillion annwyl ym mhobman, anfonwn atoch ein cariad a'n cyfarchion.

An all-age Quaker Community has gathered in Friends House and online. Video conferencing has enabled wider participation, but it can be harder to be aware of everyone in our sessions. Our time together has included programmes for children and young people, as well as Junior Yearly Meeting. We have welcomed representatives from other churches and faiths, and Friends visiting from overseas. Together we have celebrated the 400th anniversary of the birth of George Fox.

Change is a constant in life. As a faith community, we seek to follow the promptings of love and truth. As opportunities open, we try to adapt our ways and processes to meet the needs of living in a turbulent world.

We strive to be a loving body of Friends where we all support each other – but we often fall short. How can we open Quaker spaces so that everyone feels welcome? We know that we each have work to do if we are to hear voices that are unlike our own. We seek to be Spirit-led, as our experience and understanding permit. May we be aware of our limitations. May we be open to learn in love. May we be teachable.

How can we love those who do bad things? Loving is different from liking. It is an action, more than a feeling. Younger Friends invite us to say sorry to someone we love, even if we do not feel loving to them at that time.

In the Swarthmore Lecture we heard stories of people who had committed serious, violent crimes and all those who have suffered as a result. When we come close to people so hurt, there is no easy resolution to their anger, fear, disgust, shame, and despair. Our responses may include those same emotions. If we recognise these as part of ourselves, we may be more able to answer that of God in others.

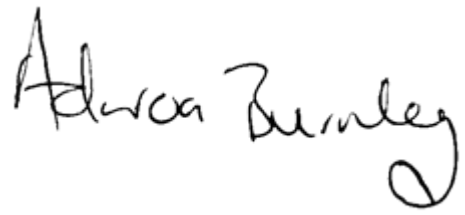
As Britain Yearly Meeting, we have minuted commitments in recent years: to care for our planet, to become an anti-racist church, to make reparations for historical injustices, to welcome and affirm those who are transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse. Much work has been done on all these by some individual Friends and Quaker meetings, as well as by our yearly meeting staff and committees. However, some have disagreed with the actions and approaches of others. This has been a cause of pain and anguish. We have heard in ministry that the strength of a church lies in how it is able to disagree with itself. In Quaker discernment, unity is not the same as unanimity. Minority views may well continue to exist. Among ourselves, we need to find kinder ground for our disagreements. Can we find joy? Can we bring joy?

At Yearly Meeting 2023 we recognised the need to simplify our structures to make them more transparent and release energy for practical ministry. We urged ourselves to be radical, courageous, and imaginative. The proposal to meet four times a year for church governance has been deeply tested, then accepted. In our discernment, our business method and the discipline this requires of us have proved robust. We look for the fuller involvement of all members and attenders in all our meetings. There are no observers in Quakers; we are all participants. Our work benefits when it is carried on by people who bring with them a range of lived experiences and spiritual insights.

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.

Isaac Penington in 1667 ([10.01 | Quaker faith & practice](#))

Signed in and on behalf of Yearly Meeting,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adwoa Burnley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a decorative flourish at the end.

Adwoa Burnley

Clerk