

Yearly Meeting 2018

Introduction: Friday 4 May – Session 1

Agenda Introduction – Clare Scott Booth

You can find our written report in Appendix A of Agenda and Notes.

Those of you who have been reading Quaker Faith and Practice recently might have noticed a paragraph about the history of our Yearly Meeting, from which we learn that it is 1668 that we have traditionally chosen as the date of establishment of what was then London Yearly Meeting, so the sequence of annual Yearly Meetings has been unbroken for 350 years. We are not making too much of it – it's just a date – but as we start this Yearly Meeting I am particularly conscious of our place in both our history and our future as a church which seeks to continuously be open to new light in today's changing world.

Whilst we're on history, it was in 1918, 100 years ago, that the Yearly Meeting clerks were called away to account to the censor and the Yearly Meeting was for the first time clerked by a woman. We are now perfectly accustomed to being clerked by women, but we are examining – we *need* to examine – how we can tackle other issues of diversity and privilege and how we can engage a wider range of voices in meaningful decision making.

Agenda Committee felt it right to dedicate the majority of the time on this agenda to different aspects of the question of whether it is right to revise Quaker Faith and Practice at this time. Tomorrow I'll talk more about the thinking behind those sessions as part of the introduction to that question. Tonight there are three other things I want to bring to your attention:

In our report, we've set out the cycle of Agenda Committee's work. It's a classic cycle of Planning – Doing – Reviewing. And it's the Reviewing part that I want to highlight – where we use our past experience to shape the future. Your feedback from Yearly Meeting Gathering 2017 was very valuable – some valiant Friends read every single response – and it will feed into the next Gathering in 2020 as well as into this Yearly Meeting. An example is the Community Hub in the Waldo Williams Suite, which builds on what has worked well to help bring people together. A further example is the changes we've been making to communications.

On Monday, we hope to take inspiration from examples of work on diversity and on sustainability, both matters we know we will need to come back to as a Yearly Meeting. In looking ahead to 2019 and 2020 we are challenged to meet and to make radical change which is exciting and dynamic. Where are we challenged to be radical in our witness in the world? Where do we need to put our own house in order? How will we follow up our urgent concerns? How will we communicate our distinctive voice and what we are already doing? We hope this session will give us both inspiration and food for thought that we will return to at future Yearly Meetings.

And finally you'll see in the report that we think the time may be coming to look again at the purpose and function of Yearly Meeting and at this stage I am just flagging that as a question for the future.

Thank you for your support and encouragement, Friends.