



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

Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting

held in person and online from 27–30 May 2022

We send loving greetings to Friends everywhere.

Friends gathered for Yearly Meeting at Friends House in London, Hemel Hempstead and online. Faith in action meetings took place online in the previous week.

Amid the challenges of the climate emergency, wars in Europe and elsewhere in the world, a global pandemic, and a cost of living crisis, it has been important to address the interwoven strands of faith, community and action. All three are necessary – we are challenged to explore how our faith connects us with one other and how we act in the world.

Ministry is rooted in our worship and faith. We have tried to listen in a generous and a hopeful way, open to new learning and trusting in the Spirit amongst us.

The sheer size of this Yearly Meeting was an indication of the possibilities of blended worship. The 'All Together Worship' on Sunday brought the face-to-face presence of over 200 Friends into one community with 78 meetings and 290 individuals online, and other Friends joining in spirit. We heard gratitude from those who were only able to be with us because of the online facility. Children 11 and under had programmes in Friends House whilst young people 11 and over met in Hemel Hempstead. Junior Yearly Meeting met earlier in the year.

We are all on a faith journey, sometimes lit up by transformational experiences, but we depend on quiet waiting on God for the nudges and shoves that lead us in new and urgent directions. We heard passionate calls to 'let go' and trust the Spirit to make clear where we will be led. We need to be ready to listen deeply and to live in the discomfort of not knowing but moving forward in faith.

In a healthy community there is always someone to help us up with a tender hand. Young adult Friends called for cross-generational conversations and accompaniment. We heard heart-warming accounts of community togetherness, including support for those with difficulties due to neurodivergence or mental health problems. However, although we pride ourselves on being good at building peace for others, we sometimes find it hard to do this within our own communities.

Some have welcomed returning to meeting face to face. Others embrace online communication as enabling and inclusive; we are discovering new ways to build Quaker communities. We recognise that the life of our Meetings depends on reaching out into the world and searching for new insights. Are our Quaker communities models for what we want to see – places of openness, active listening, deep communication and connection? We cannot offer this vision to others without healing ourselves.

Many of us were saddened and ashamed to hear personal experiences of racism: descriptions of an event where none of the bystanders on the street supported the Friend, and another within the context of service on a Quaker central committee. A necessary first step against oppression is to believe one another's accounts and experiences.

We were given powerful evidence of Quaker engagement in the transatlantic slave trade. It is important to understand and tell the truth about the past – it is even more important to recognise its enduring consequences: the trauma and impact on lives in the present.

We must start making changes now and for the future: “planting flowers as well as pulling up weeds.” Britain Yearly Meeting resolves to build on our decision last year to be an anti-racist church, working with partners, including churches and faith groups, to look at ways to make meaningful reparations for our failings. We need to take urgent action as individuals, in our local, area and yearly meetings.

“What do love and justice require of us?”

Signed in and on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting

Siobhán Haire, Clerk