

Notes from Meeting for sufferings 05-10-2024

Due to a family emergency, I set off late and missed the early items. Not a very good start to my triennium. Fortunately, apart from the opening worship, all the early items were formal and I arrived a short way into the consideration of “new ways of belonging”. So..

New Ways of Belonging

Friends are considering the increasing demand for non-geographical membership. Traditionally, our membership of the society has been via Area Meetings and people who are not regular members in any one Area Meeting have to decide how to deal with being members. Often this is a bit of a fudge, so it is worth considering if there's a better way to do this, especially in the light of the increasing number of people who attend online. Friends felt that a method of allowing non-geographic membership should be pursued. They were less enthusiastic about membership via interest groups.

Trustees' Report

This was provided for information and spoken to by Marisa Johnson, our clerk of trustees. The report was wide ranging and is available online. One item of interest was the developments with Woodbrooke. Since the house was sold, there has been work done on a digital library as well as a significant expansion of online self-guided learning. There is also, now an online cafe for people to meet tutors and interact with other learners.

Review of Central Structures

The group set up to review our central structures gave an update on their work to share its thinking. The main thrust of this is that Quaker Life and Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committees should be merged. A consultation document went to Area Meetings last month (giving a very short time to respond - 13th October) with the aim of taking the proposals to Yearly Meeting in 2025. Any change can only be made by Yearly Meeting.

Israel and Palestine

A wide range of committees have expressed their discernment about the language we should use when describing the situation in Israel and Palestine. Meeting for Sufferings was clear that, despite the possible tensions with interfaith relations, it is necessary to speak truth as we understand it. Friends discerned that we should be clear that we are in agreement with the International Court of Justice in saying that the state of Israel is practising **apartheid** and that there is a **plausible risk of genocide** in the ongoing situation.

Reparations

The Reparations Working Group reported on their work so far. Friends were impressed. Members of the group are keen to engage with area meetings and share their findings so far about British Quaker involvement in slavery, colonialism and economic exploitation.

Marriage Declaration

We have been asked to consider the wording of the marriage declaration for the revised book of discipline. Though Friends are not of one mind about what changes need to be made, there is a will to take the consideration forward with a general feeling that we must not lose the special nature of Quaker marriages and that it is important to stress the need for assistance in a marriage. A working group will be established under the auspices of Quaker Life to take this forward. Sufferings will return to the matter at a later date

Going Forward

I'm keen to use my role as Area Meeting representative to deepen our engagement with Meeting for Sufferings. In future, I will hopefully circulate the agenda and selected papers to Local Meetings as soon as I get them, so that Friends can brief me on their thoughts in advance of Sufferings. I don't want to just report things after the fact. I'll also circulate the minutes of Sufferings with my report.

Thank you Friends

Ian Chandler

November 2024