

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

At the Yearly Meeting held in London at Friends House
4–7 May 2018



Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting, held at Friends House, London on 4 - 7 May 2018

To Friends around the world:

Loving greetings from Britain Yearly Meeting 2018, gathered in glorious sunshine in and around London from 4 to 7 May. We have rejoiced in the voice and witness of Friends of all ages. Our diversity has been enriched by over 40 Friends and visitors from around the globe, with whom we have shared stories. We have experienced different traditions of worship, created art, sung, and danced together.

The sequence of annual Yearly Meetings in Britain has been unbroken for 350 years. This year our focus has been to discern whether we are led to revise our book of discipline, which we adopted as '*Quaker faith & practice*' in 1994. This follows four years of work by our Revision Preparation Group, and study of *Quaker faith & practice* by many Friends and local meetings.

Periodic revision of the book of discipline is an essential part of our witness, recalling the past and looking to the future.

Encouraged by the voices of younger Friends among us, we have united joyfully, to embark on a Spirit-led process of revision from much-loved foundations. We know that this will take time and energy. We are clear that we have the resources to undertake this, while continuing our witness in the wider world.

Many voices, experiences and identities are missing from our current book. Since the last revision, our Quaker community and the world around us have changed. We need a book of discipline that reflects more closely who we are now, and explains how and why we do what we do.

At each session, we have heard readings from books of discipline from other times or other yearly meetings. A passage from 'Living Adventurously', Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting, resonated with the ministry and our desire to see each other truly:

"Africans have a greeting that means 'I see you.'... Seeing a person, in that salutation, means what is called eyeball to eyeball contact; recognising the presence of a person... someone as alive and as self-aware and as vulnerable as you are. I see you" (Guy Butler, 1994).

This process of revision may become a renewal and transformation of who we are. Some of our younger children have asked: 'What do we want to be? How would we like the world to be?' We need to be bold and creative in our vision. As we heard in the Swarthmore Lecture, given by Chris Alton, 'We must imagine this future, for if we cannot imagine it, we cannot speak it into existence.'

In listening to one another we have been both inspired and challenged by our religious diversity. Viewed from a distance, our Quaker community may seem like a single body. Up close, it sparkles in its infinite variety. Diversity in our beliefs and language is a richness, not a flaw.

We each choose our own words, and together our stories make a whole. We are not only individuals, but also part of a church. We want the language of our book to be accessible, and also to reflect the wealth of our tradition, and of our experiences today.

Making space to reflect our religious diversity may be painful. We should not shy away from expressing who we are. We accept our vulnerability. We need to be tender with one another, balancing truth in one hand and love in the other. By listening open-heartedly to one another, we will hear where words come from.

Change brings both excitement and apprehension. We have faith that our Quaker processes will help us follow the leadings of God, and take us where we need to be.

"And the end of words is to bring men to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter" (Isaac Penington, *Quaker faith & practice* 27.27)

Signed in and on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting



Deborah Rowlands

Clerk