

At a specially convened meeting of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Woodbrooke on Saturday 21 May 2022

Quiet Room Elders: Ginnie Wollaston, Jo Hindley. Pastoral care: Paula Button

Cadbury Room Elders: Jim Green, Mark Russ. Pastoral care: Howard Saunders

Zoom Elders: John Cockcroft, Barbara Cockcroft, Barbara Groombridge

2022.35 Representatives

All our local meetings are represented here today
We welcome the following Attenders to our meeting:

Cyril Bezant (COT), Joanne Blakey (SEL), Claire Cavendish (BUL), Andrew Cheffings (BOU), Anne Christie (AML), Peter Doubtfire (BUL), Robert Ferguson (SOL), Rosanna Ghinai (SEL), John Harding (WAR), Peter Kirkman (COT), Jon Longstaff (STO), Maggie McHale (COV), Willemina Morton (SEL), Ian Neal (BOU) Marc Pearson (SEL), Megan Pearson (SEL), Ruth Stagg (COV), Ian Taylor (SUT), Sue Wilding (STO), Juliet Woodhall (WAL).

We welcome other Friends and visitors to our meeting.

2022.36 Membership matters

Since our last meeting we have heard of the death of the following Friends

Judith Chapman B&R on 11 May 2022 aged 86

Pat Slessenger WAR on 9 May 2022 aged 89

2022.37 The future of Central England Quakers: What does love require of us? (Background)

We are meeting at Woodbrooke for a specially convened meeting following our minute 2021.911 when we were asked whether the time had come to consider our aims and objectives, and to review our priorities and the right use of our resources. Trustees Finance Committee (FC) were asked to facilitate a special meeting and the co-clerks asked to arrange it.

At meetings of representatives of FC and the co-clerks it was agreed that we should hold a day long area meeting at Woodbrooke, if we could find a suitable date, as this would provide a suitable environment for careful consideration of the matters in hand. We decided that the event should be free of charge and that, although this would be a significant cost, it would be a sound investment in our future.

FC and co-clerks then worked with Alison Richards of Woodbrooke to prepare a programme for the day to include children and young people as well as adults. We asked Peacemakers to oversee the children's programme so that parents could be free to join the adult meeting. We saw the event as an opportunity for spiritual refreshment as well as due deliberation and the chance to be in each others' company again after the isolation of the Covid pandemic.

Leaflets detailing the background for the event and a registration form were sent to all local meetings and by the close of registration 129 Friends had registered, including 18 to join us on Zoom, and 13 children. Friends were asked to volunteer to help with child care, as group facilitators and elders as well as helping with registration the day. Volunteers were readily forthcoming for these roles, as well as for pastoral care. Speakers to introduce the day were invited and happily accepted. We feel blessed to be part of such a willing group of Friends as well as to be at Woodbrooke whose staff have worked beyond the call of duty to provide the day for us.

2022.38 Children and young people's programme

We are pleased that our children and young people have been following a parallel programme organised by Peacemakers during the day and have been able to join us on Zoom for a period of all-age worship. Their report is attached to these minutes.

2022.39 The future of Central England Quakers: What does love require of us? (Consideration)

To start our consideration today we have heard from Claire Bowman about the structure and activity of our Area Meeting. Our trustees are responsible for our governance and the right ordering of our affairs, but we are also very active in the world, being involved with peace, chaplaincy work, care of the elderly, education and in numerous other ways.

Anne Ullathorne spoke to the paper from the Finance Committee and reminded us of the story of Jacob Epstein's sculpture of Jacob and the Angel. We need to start wrestling with the significant financial resources which we have inherited. Three options face us:

- to do nothing, inevitably leading to our decline
- to be extremely radical, giving our resources away to answer the manifold needs of the world.
- or to listen to our leadings, searching for a vision of where we might be in the future.

Wrestling with the angel will not be an easy task as we follow *Quaker Faith & Practice* 15.02, recognising that we are called to exercise stewardship of the Society's resources so that we can participate in building a responsible and caring community.

Pete Duckworth has given us an overview of the contributions already received from Local Meetings and individual Friends in answer to the three questions indicated in the invitations leaflet:

- Do you have a sense of how we might discern God's call for us now and into the future?
- What do you think our AM's priorities might be as we face the future together?
- Are there any financial implications in what you suggest?

Pete's summary of the responses will be included in the paper entitled *Responses from Local Meetings and individual Friends* and be available after the meeting.

In our consideration we have been reminded of the need to support small meetings and any Friends who feel excluded for whatever reasons. We have heard about the work of our Meeting Houses Management Group which can support any meeting with property and book-keeping as well as in other financial matters. We seem to talk a lot but not always say very much sometimes. We have been reminded of an earlier exercise relating to South Birmingham which may be worth revisiting. We have heard of the joy of seeing each other again and getting to know each other socially as well as in the things which are eternal. Intervisitation may be a help with this. We could do with concentrating on the things that we "must have" as well as valuing the things that it would be "nice to have". We need to hear each others' personal concerns and join with like-minded Friends, valuing our strengths and weaknesses as we work on inreach and outreach. We realise that this is just the beginning of the process and we need to move on from here.

2022.40 Stepping in to the future

We have received part of Minute 22.17 from the Clerks Advisory Committee held 11 May. We agree that for this work to come to fruition it would be useful to have a small working group to continue the work. We ask our nominations committee to bring forward the names of three or four Friends who might serve on such a group. Friends interested in this service are encouraged to make themselves known to the AM clerks or to a member of the nominations committee, so that their names can be considered. We note the suggestion that the working group should keep QF&P 4.02 in mind during its deliberations and we are happy to accept this idea.

We are also aware that there is a need for us all to take up this exercise. We ask our Local Meetings, committees and other branches to reflect on the lessons we have learned today, and to report back to us as soon as they can.

2022.41 Thanks & next meeting

We are aware of the considerable amount of work which has gone in to organising our event today and are grateful to the staff of Woodbrooke and the many Area Meeting Friends who have made it all work so smoothly. The next Area Meeting, should nothing occur to prevent, will be blended from Cotteridge on Saturday 18 June 2-5pm

2022.42 Concluding minute

We came together today to seek God's will for us as we do our human best to prepare for the future of our Area Meeting. We have felt the Spirit move amongst as we have considered the various issues put before us. We have felt energised by the possibilities which face us. We feel enriched by being in each other's company after the long period of the coronavirus pandemic and we are thankful to be able to meet again in this way, to eat together again, and to see each others' faces again. May God's Spirit guide us as we continue into the unknown.

John Sheldon
Clerk this time