

# **Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Selly Oak Meeting House and online on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024**

Clerk: Rae Ritchie Assistant Clerk: Paula Button  
Elders: Alison Ironside and Stuart Morton  
Pastoral Friend: Fran Wilde

## **2024.041 Worship**

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard Quaker Faith and Practice 20.20

*For a Quaker, religion is not an external activity, concerning a special 'holy' part of the self. It is an openness to the world in the here and now with the whole of the self. If this is not simply a pious commonplace, it must take into account the whole of our humanity: our attitudes to other human beings in our most intimate as well as social and political relationships. It must also take account of our life in the world around us, the way we live, the way we treat animals and the environment. In short, to put it in traditional language, there is no part of ourselves and of our relationships where God is not present.*

*Harvey Gillman, 1988*

## **2024.042 Representatives**

The following Local Meetings are represented: BGR, BOU, BUL, COT, COV, HAL, HAR, KIN, SEL, SOL, STO, WAL, WAR.

The clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today:  
Fran Wilde (SEL) and Willemina Morton (SEL).

## **2024.043 How the Truth has prospered at Selly Oak Meeting**

We have received a report from Selly Oak Meeting informing us of how the Truth has prospered over the last year. The report reads as follows:

*We have had a good but challenging year. We have welcomed many new Friends but also had some sad losses with funerals for Roland Dale, David Pugh and John Ironside. Some long serving Friends have felt the need to step back from core roles. However, this has provoked a process of positive, whole Meeting, reflection on what is essential, how we can include more people in roles and simplify wherever possible. We have at present a thriving Pastoral Group, a healthy Children's Meeting and a Holding Group who are tasked with filling the vacancies of eldership, clerking team, premises and nominations. Our hope this year is to encourage newer members of our community to try out some of these roles.*

*The Children's Meeting meets weekly for stories, craft, cooking, gardening and outdoor play. It feels like we have a good team of parents and helpers. The children have enjoyed joining with the adults for community events such as Christmas Breakfast, Bonfire Night, Parcel Packing, charity work and climate action - there have also been special theatre trips and warm welcomes at All Age/ Area meetings.*

*The young people of Selly Oak Meeting join with others from the Area Meeting at the monthly Youth Group (aged 10-17 years). Recent activities have included sleepovers in a canal boat, and at a meeting house, crafts, running an all-age worship, bonfire, picnic, outward bound activities and learning about Quaker practice. Two refugee guests have been included throughout the year.*

*Through-out the year we have enjoyed “Joy Fridays” where we meet at 5:30pm for a simple meal and fun activity. We have glass painted, breathed, danced, played silly games, tried block printing, origami and Christmas decoration making. We have also had a number of learning events including the Woodbrooke Quaker Spirituality Course and a facilitated workshop on how to simplify the life of the meeting. Our Meetings for Learning at the community’s request have been focusing on Quaker spirituality for the last three months and we will now move into looking at the spiritual underpinnings of Quaker business method.*

*We are very fortunate to have several Friends acting under concerns for racial justice, refugee and asylum work and climate action. Their actions in these areas have provoked and challenged us and we have nourished and cherished them.*

*Environmental concern was the driver for important improvements to our Meeting House this year including zoning our heating circuit, draft proofing, insulation, fitting blinds and installing a destratification fan. Our Premises Committee hosted and were part of Footsteps Interfaith Events to promote and share information about these improvements. We are glad to let our building to many groups undertaking important work within our community. We have a refugee charity, “Women with Hope” who meet each week. There is regular interaction from some members of the Meeting through sharing food together, organising clothes repair workshops and collections of toiletries and Christmas gift bags. We have a partnership with Birmingham Mind and offer a free room each week. We also let to the German Lutheran Church in Birmingham and are building closer links with them. We are also used by the local Sikh Community for a women’s group and other activities. We let to various dance, music and art groups.*

*We are blessed in having a Meeting House manager who, as well as being highly efficient, is a Quaker and an active member of our Meeting. In looking at the uses of our Meeting House involving past premises members, the Meeting House manager and the holding group we are conscious that with the closure of the Woodbrooke building we are the Quaker presence on the Bristol Road in our area. We are therefore giving thought to signage and its visibility as well as to how we can use our premises to give visitors an uplifting and peaceful impression of who we are and who we all can become.*

*In this present national climate, we are very conscious of the growing needs of our community, and while challenged sometimes in areas of care, safeguarding and resources we feel thankful that we understand the value of each other and that we are all striving to be guided by love.*

## **2024.044 Minutes from Local Meetings: Refugee Week**

We have received the following minute from Sutton Coldfield Local Meeting.

### ***Minute from Sutton Coldfield Local Meeting***

#### ***2024/24 Refugee Week 2024***

*Refugee Week is being held from 17th-23rd June this year and we have been invited by Barbara Forbes via the Area Meeting Office to consider if there is anything we would like to do as a Meeting to mark this.*

*We agree to hold a letter-writing session on Sunday 23rd June with the aim of contacting MPs and other relevant people regarding our concern with the creation of the ‘hostile environment’ for refugees and asylum seekers.*

*We ask Area Meeting to consider putting together a briefing pack on the issue which could be shared with Meetings across the Area Meeting before this year’s Refugee Week. We agree to forward this minute to Area Meeting.*

We have also received a number of existing resources promoting relevant events over the next couple of months as well as exploring how to engage with MPs about refugees from a Quaker perspective, shared by Barbara Forbes. In light of the general election being announced for 4<sup>th</sup> July,

Barbara encouraged Friends to write to all prospective candidates in their constituency about this issue too. She also encouraged those Meetings that are not currently active on this issue to consider how they can become more active ahead of Refugee Week 2025.

BGR have a film about Syrian refugees being taken in by a former mining community that they plan to show and can share with other meetings. Barbara Forbes can also visit Local Meetings to discuss these issues.

The CEQ office will share the booklet of resources after this Meeting.

## **2024.045 George Fox 400**

The following local events are currently planned to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of George Fox.

- 25<sup>th</sup> May: Celebration Day at Hartshill Meeting House, 10am to 4pm
- 14<sup>th</sup> July: Programmed Meeting for Worship with readings of George Fox, Warwick Meeting House, 10.30am
- 14<sup>th</sup> July: Fox 400 "Pilgrimage" and "Nudges and Winks" concert in conjunction with Birmingham Churches Together, beginning and ending at Selly Oak Meeting House, 1pm to 6.30pm
- Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August: Devotional Area Meeting, Hartshill Meeting House
- Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September: outreach event, shared picnic lunch and film show at Barnt Green Meeting House

For the rest of 2024, "George Fox 400" will be a recurring agenda item at Area Meetings and we ask Local Meetings to keep the CEQ office informed of any events planned. Further details will be published as they become available.

## **2024.046 Friends Acting Under Concern**

The trial of four Friends from Central England Area Meeting for action at the Telford Arms Fair has been postponed and no new date has yet been set. Friends are reminded that their support is still needed and that they can join the WhatsApp group for updates (<https://chat.whatsapp.com/CLOs2wAvR2rG4fDcZNdQZ8>).

## **2024.047 Quaker Week Responses and Outreach**

(a) Quaker Week

We have received the following responses to CEAQM minute 2024.028 Quaker Week and World Quaker Day.

### ***Information from Barnt Green Local Meeting***

*Our film group have procured a 14-minute film about the life of George Fox and we plan to show this as part of an outreach event on the afternoon of Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September following a shared picnic lunch at the Meeting House.*

*The film will be followed by time for discussion and questions, with light refreshments.*

*The film could be made available to other Local Meetings after we have shown it at Barnt Green if they have suitable equipment and would like to show it.*

### ***Information from Cotteridge Local Meeting***

*Cotteridge Quaker Meeting do not currently have any plans for Quaker Week 2024. As a community we are involved with the Fox400 pilgrimage on 14 July 2024 organised by Bournville, Selly Oak and Cotteridge and will use this as an outreach opportunity in our local community, and with the local ecumenical network. Friends also support Bournville Friends with the Heritage Open Day events. We do not feel we have capacity for much else. We would be very happy for Area Meeting to coordinate a plan for Quaker Week 2024 but I am not able to promise how much energy there may be from Friends*

at Cotteridge at the time to support it practically.

### **Information from Hartshill Local Meeting**

As you know Hartshill has a number of dates for events around the George Fox 400 anniversary lined up. We are hoping to plan a community coffee morning event around the time of Quaker Week which will be another opportunity to view the George Fox 400 exhibitions we will have at the Meeting House this year.

### **Minute from Selly Oak Local Meeting**

#### **2024/22 Quaker Week (28 Sept – 6 October)**

We have agreed to hold an open day on Sunday October 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **Minute from Sutton Coldfield Local Meeting**

#### **2024/23 Quaker Week 2024**

Area Meeting has asked Local Meetings to consider their plans for this year's Quaker Week, which runs from 28<sup>th</sup> September to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2024. They are seeking our responses to the following four questions by Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024:

- What would your meeting like to do for Quaker Week?
- What does your meeting feel they have the capacity to do?
- Is there an opportunity for Local Meetings to work together in clusters to offer a programme of events?
- Would Friends like to see an Area Meeting-wide coordinated plan for Quaker Week?

We agree that working together in clusters is more practical for us. We like the idea of Area Meeting coordinating ideas and events we could join in. Specifically, we are to consider our own one-day event for repairing clothes with possible links with Oxfam and the Sutton Coldfield public. We suggest Area Meeting offers to coordinate a group of F/friends who are willing and able to take school assemblies in Quaker Week.

### **Minute from Warwick Local Meeting**

#### **Minute 24/23 Request from Area Meeting about Local Meetings views on Quaker Week (28<sup>th</sup> September to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2024)**

Activities: Area Meeting Minute 2024.028 asked that Local Meetings give their views on four questions about arrangements for Quaker Week and Fox@400. We have been asked to respond by Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May.

- What would our Meeting like to do? Our Elders and Pastoral Friends are already planning events for Fox@400 and Quaker Week.
- What does our Meeting feel we have the capacity to do? As above.
- Is there an opportunity for Local Meetings to work together in clusters to offer programmes of events? We are happy to co-operate with other Local Meetings
- Would Friends like to see an Area Meeting-wide coordinated plan for Quaker Week? We will cooperate and provide information for an Area Meeting plan for Quaker Week.

We ask our Clerk to forward our responses by 7<sup>th</sup> May and include our plans for Fox 400 and Quaker Week.

Warwick LM Plans for Fox400 and Quaker Week.

- Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July - Programmed Meeting for Worship with readings of George Fox.
- Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September Nudge and Wink entertainment.
- Friday 4<sup>th</sup> October Quaker Film

We note that Selly Oak plan to invite all of their Meeting's user groups to their Open Day in October, which is an idea that other Local Meetings may wish to pursue. Local Meetings may also wish to order

the special bumper edition of *the Friend* being published for Quaker Week.

We thank Barnt Green and Redditch Meeting for their offer to loan the George Fox film to other Meetings who have suitable tech facilities. We ask any Meetings interested in taking up this offer to contact Barnt Green and Redditch Meeting directly.

Friends interested in going into schools to deliver assemblies should email the CEQ office and the Area Meeting Clerks will co-ordinate a way forward with this. The office will also bring together a calendar of planned events for Quaker Week to share with Local Meetings and the CEQ newsfeed. We ask Local Meetings to keep the office informed of any additional events or updates.

#### (b) Outreach

At the July Area Meeting, we hope to explore the topic of outreach with our Local Development Worker, Hilary Topp. To help Local Meeting representatives prepare for this, we ask Local Meetings to consider the following queries and share their responses with their representative(s) for the July Area Meeting.

- What does Outreach mean to you? Which of the following forms of Outreach are important to you, and are there others?
  - Organising or attending events where you can provide a Quaker presence, and engage with people
  - Having an effective and informative website and/or active social media platform
  - Advertising your Meeting on notice boards or in local publications
  - Making visitors feel welcome and valued
  - Taking part in demonstrations or protests
  - Taking an active part in Ecumenical and Interfaith work
  - Letting your Meeting House spaces for community use
- What methods do you use to promote your Meeting to potential new attenders, and how easy are you to find and contact?
- How do you make new visitors feel welcome? Is the task shared by all? Do you try to strike the right balance between making people feel welcome but not pressured or burdened?
- Do you have a “welcome pack” of simple leaflets to give to visitors who express an interest in coming more than once? Are you mindful of their need to understand the spiritual aspects of your Meeting as well as your concerns and “activist” agenda?
- If you imagine walking through the door of your Meeting for the first time what would be your first impressions? Do the posters and notice boards make you feel welcome and say something about being a Quaker, or do they seem too introspective?
- Do you consider the messages that you give to groups hiring the Meeting House, and whether they might be interested in finding out more about Quakers, or even attending appropriate events?
- What would be most helpful to your Meeting in terms of central support?

## **2024.048 Community Justice Group Report and Accounts**

We have received the annual report and accounts from the CEQ Community Justice Group (CJG). The report details the group’s transition from Branch status to an Area Meeting Committee, which means less work for group members while still allowing for CJG ring-fenced funds in the General Fund. The accounts provided are the final set from their separate account, which is now closed. Appointments to the group will, however, continue to go through Nominations.

The report outlines the areas of work that the CJG is active in, notably the Sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP). Britain Yearly Meeting circulated the template letter created by CJG for Quakers to use to lobby their MPs about this issue to the wider Quakers in Community Justice Network and the government has taken some limited action on this. The report also shares the work undertaken by individual members of CJG, which includes ecumenical and interfaith activities as well as chaplaincy roles in universities, hospitals, police and prisons.

Claire Bowman (BOU) drew our attention to the advertisement for the director role for WorkCare, which is part of the chaplaincy networks we are involved with. Claire is also hoping to organise a conference about antisemitism and Islamophobia and has been asked to facilitate a session about antisemitism ahead of Yearly Meeting. More details can be found on the Yearly Meeting website.

We thank the CJG for their hard work and commitment to these issues, which have long been part of Quaker witness but remain highly challenging. Anyone wishing to find out more about their activities or get involved should contact Patricia Bradbury (STO).

## **2024.049 Peace Committee**

We have received the following minute from the CEQ Peace Committee.

*Peace Committee (Pete Doubtfire, Cathy Khurana, Barbara Forbes, Mary Mather) met on 30th April to discuss its future.*

*2024/01 We have agreed to lay down Peace Committee.*

*We understand that Peace Committee has at present £7184.53 in funds.*

*We recognise that people's energies and support is currently being given to Asylum matters.*

*The Asylum Group continues to function as a group of concerned Friends.*

*We suggest that an informal Peace Group (facilitated by Peace Hub) continues to promote our witness to peace.*

*We suggest that Peace Committee funds be ring fenced (as part of Peace Hub budget) to facilitate and support peace activities (including Asylum activities) across the Area Meeting.*

*Mary Mather (clerk for this meeting)*

We agree to the transfer of Peace Committee funds to the Peace Hub budget within Area Meeting accounts. We also ask that the Peace Hub keeps Area Meeting informed about arrangements for a more informal Peace Group.

We thank these Friends, and former members of Peace Committee, for their support of this testimony and hope that the move to the new arrangement frees up energy and momentum to continue their work on asylum and other peace issues as they feel led.

## **2024.050 Membership**

There are no membership matters this month.

## **2024.051 Nominations**

### **a) Nominations Committee suggests:**

Helen Waters (SEL) to serve for another triennium on Children and Young People's Committee from July 2024 to Jun 2027

Marilyn Biles (WAR) to serve on Children and Young People's Committee from June 2024 to May 2027

Rosalie Rider (STO) to serve for another triennium on the Susanna Cole Trust from June 2024 to May 2027

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

### **b) Local Meetings suggest:**

Georgie Thomas (BGR) to serve on Area Meeting nominations committee for a triennium from May 2024 to April 2027

This name being acceptable we appoint our Friend accordingly.

## **2024.052 Revision of the Book of Discipline: Wording of the Marriage Declaration**

We have received the following minutes and report from Local Meetings, all of which will be forwarded to the Committee for the Revision of the Book of Discipline.

### **Minute from Cotteridge Local Meeting**

#### **2024/12 Revision of Quaker Faith and Practice**

*We have received the following minute from Area Meeting held on 27 January 2024:*

*2024.008. Revision of Book of Discipline*

*The book of discipline revision committee have two draft chapters, nominations and marriage, available for comment, as part of a consultation exercise. The draft chapters and a form for comments and suggestions are available on this webpage <https://quaker.org.uk/resources/quaker-faith-and-practice/revising-quaker-faith-practice>*

*A particular query is whether the terms of the Quaker Marriage Declaration should require both parties to state that they will be loving and devoted partners with “God’s help or with Divine assistance” – as it does at present.*

*This is an important issue - Local Meetings and individual Friends are encouraged to study this material and participate in the consultation by offering discernment, using the form provided.*

*Friends can also suggest ideas and specific passages for inclusion in the new Book of Discipline. Although the clerks are not presently planning a sharing of views at Area Meeting level, we will be pleased to receive Minutes from Local Meetings on this topic, via the CEQ Office.*

*A discussion about this was held on Sunday 3 March. Individuals are also welcome to respond.*

*We ask that Central England Area Meeting set aside some time for us to engage with this matter at Area Meeting.*

### **Minute from Barnt Green and Redditch Local Meeting**

#### **BGR 2024.31 The Book of Discipline – revised wording of the Marriage Declaration**

*At Area Meeting in May, some time will be given to discussing the wording of the Quaker Marriage Declaration, and in particular whether both parties should be required to state that they will be loving and devoted partners “with God’s help or with Divine assistance” as it does at present.*

*Local Meetings and individual Friends are encouraged to study the draft chapter available and participate in the consultation by offering discernment, using the form provided (link in the From Area Meeting document attached to the agenda for our BM).*

*AM Clerks have agreed to set aside time for Friends to engage with this matter at May’s Area Meeting, and invite Local Meetings to send a minute by 7<sup>th</sup> May for inclusion in the AM papers.*

*This was considered at our Meeting for Business today (5<sup>th</sup> May); Barnt Green & Redditch Meeting is content for the wording to remain as stated.*

### **Minute from Bournville Local Meeting**

#### **2024.10 Revision of Book of Discipline**

*In December 2022, the Book of Discipline Revision Committee issued two draft chapters on Nominations and Marriage. As well as Bournville Friends responding individually, several of us discussed this and responded as a group. Once again, we have been asked to comment on these same two draft chapters. Meeting for Sufferings have a particular query: it is whether the terms of the Quaker Marriage Declaration should require both parties to state that they will be loving and devoted partners with “God’s help” or with “Divine assistance” – as it does at present.*

*We recognise that this has been discussed for a number of years at Yearly Meeting and that there are a range of different views. Some of the differing views have been expressed in our own meeting. Several friends feel it is important to retain the expressions, ‘with God’s help’ or ‘with Divine assistance’. We feel it is important to recognise that we are a religious society of friends and not a secular society; we are aware of our traditional belief in God. However, we recognise that some non-*

theist friends in our community are not comfortable with these expressions. A couple of friends have suggested that there might be an option of having alternative expressions, such as 'promising to be a loving and faithful partner'. In one friend's view, this matter is less a question about revising the book of discipline, but rather questions about how broad we want our community to be and how do we make space to include people.

We ask our clerks to forward this minute to the Area Office.

### **Minute from Bull Street Local Meeting**

This is a minute that was agreed at our last Business Meeting, and is to be sent to both Area Meeting and the Book of Discipline Revision Committee:

The Book of Discipline Revision Committee is considering the terms of the Quaker Marriage Declaration, and whether it should require both parties to state that they will be loving and devoted partners with 'God's help' or 'with Divine assistance', as it does presently. We feel that this should remain the wording of the declaration.

### **Sutton Coldfield Quaker Meeting**

#### **Study group on the revised Marriage section of the Book of Discipline 25/02/24**

We agree that Marriage is a serious religious and spiritual commitment and that we would wish Quaker weddings to be offered only to couples who accept that and are making the commitment in that spirit.

The preamble before the declaration is well written, clear, and helpful.

Regarding the declaration it is fair to say we are not fully in unity. The following quotes summarise key points and reasoning expressed.

1. We have never known anyone to use the form of words "In fear of the Lord" at their wedding. This wording is archaic and easily misunderstood – especially by non-religious people who might be attending a wedding. We doubt that it should still be included.
2. I find it strange that "in the presence of these witnesses" is only available when linked with "the fear of the Lord". The latter being unusual language these days and the former being fundamental to gathering of Friends for a marriage.

Thereafter most discussion and ideas revolved around language, especially the use of "God" which could exclude our non-theist Friends whom we have accepted into membership. Could the Book of Discipline offer an alternative wording which recognises the spiritual element of the commitment but does not use God language? This would be an option for non-theists - excluding any reference to God's help or divine assistance, but those with a belief in God would continue to be able to use the current wording. Could the Registering Officer have discretion to agree with the couple on a variation to the wording that still expresses the religious and spiritual nature of the commitment?

Some agree that the Celebration of Commitment provides a way around the problem. Others felt that if we agree that it is right to find a way around a rule, that suggests that the rule was badly formed and should be amended.

Comments submitted from 2 Friends unable to attend the workshop:

- Another option might be not to make the wording of the vows mandatory, but then I would suggest with that any agreed variations, it should be made clear that they have been specifically requested by the bride and groom at the marriage meeting. Of course, some qualified Quaker wedding officiants may not be willing to accept non-God wedding vows which might close this option to them.
- I think that if two Friends announce their intention to marry and declare their commitment to one another in a Meeting for that purpose, then they are married. I don't feel that either the form of words or the invocation of a Higher Power are important.

Richard Begg & Fiona Waterhouse, Co-Clerks, Sutton Coldfield Local Meeting



It is clear from these minutes and from spoken ministry in this Meeting that while some Local Meetings are clear in their view that we should stick to the current wording, others are not in unity. There is a tension at the heart of these considerations: we are a religious society that also includes many non-theist Friends for whom the current options are problematic. How inclusive do we want to be?

Some Friends who have had a Quaker wedding themselves spoke movingly about the importance of asking for divine assistance, which includes the support of their Local Meeting at the time. If we believe in that of God in everyone, this needs to be central to the words used during the marriage service.

There is a sense that it would be acceptable to have a third statement alongside the existing two options that better accommodated non-theist Friends, but we are not a secular society and therefore this alternate statement also needs to include reference to the spiritual nature of the commitment of marriage. As it states in Advices and Queries 23, "Marriage has always been regarded by Friends as religious commitment rather than a merely civil contract."

## **2024.053 Minute from Trustees: Memorandum of Understanding between Britain Yearly Meeting and Organisations forming part of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain**

We have received a copy of the following minute from our Trustees, together with the letter from the Deputy Recording Clerk and Section 3 of the Memorandum of Understanding included in the Area Meeting papers.

### ***T24.05.08 MoU with BYM***

*Trustees have considered the contents of the MoU and accompanying letter. We are minded to recommend to AM that this is signed off by trustees. Section 3 is the most useful section to help AM understand why this MoU will be helpful to us. The clerk is asked to send this minute to AM clerks.*

We suggest the following minute agreeing to enter into this MOU:

We agree to enter into the memorandum of understanding between Britian Yearly Meeting and Organisations forming the Religious Society of Friends in Britain on this date. We will retain a copy of this document for reference alongside our other key governance documents.

## **2024.054 Quaker Life Representative Council Report**

We have received a copy of the following letter, sent to Quaker Life representatives in May 2024 from Jen Neal, convenor of Quaker Life Representative Council (QLRC), together with a report to Quaker Life Central Committee from Quaker Life Representative Council Planning Group in January 2024, which is available in the Area Meeting papers.

*Dear Quaker Life Rep,*

*We wanted to let you know what's happening with Quaker Life Representative Council (QLRC) in 2024. It was already going to look different from how it's been in past years, but now it's changing again.*

*You may recall that we planned to experiment in 2024 by having three regional gatherings across the year, each of them blended in-person and online, and based at a meeting house or other venue in the relevant part of Britain. The idea was for QLRC Reps in those nations and regions to gather together, but in a way that didn't require such long travel. It could also help to strengthen links between neighbouring AMs and Quaker communities.*

*Sadly, we're not going to be able to deliver that this year. The QLRC Planning Group is significantly under strength, with only two people on it at present; the staff who support the organisation and delivery of QLRC haven't had the capacity to get this done in time. Both they and we very much regret that. But we also don't want to ask dedicated Friends and staff to do ever more with fewer people –*

*care of those working for and serving us is also a part of our Quaker life. We fully expect that we will have the regional QLRC gatherings in 2025, when we hope the Planning Group will be bigger and the staff fully able to support them.*

*However, we think there is an opportunity to spend time as a national Quaker community looking at the issues that QLRCs often look at, such as the theology of modern Quakerism, membership and belonging, being a spiritual community, or outreach. On 18-20 October there is a major conference on the Future of British Quakerism, organised by Woodbrooke in collaboration with BYM. Meetings will be encouraged to send representatives; these might be QLRC reps or might be other Friends. As this event is about the future of British Quakerism, meetings may want to consider sending newer or younger people who can expect to be around for more of that future. But regardless of who attends, we hope that the conference and its outcomes will help guide QLRC, and British Quakers more generally, into 2025 and beyond.*

*In Friendship*

<i>Jen Neal</i>	<i>Oliver Robertson</i>
<i>Convenor</i>	<i>Head of Witness and Worship</i>
<i>QLRC</i>	<i>Quakers in Britain</i>

We thank our Quaker Life Rep, Lee Gunn (COV), for providing these documents for us for our information and for representing us in this important group going forward. The joint themes of “Spiritual nurture: filling your bucket” and “Our life is love: finding nurture in our spiritual communities” are very important to all Quakers at this time and to this Area Meeting.

## **2024.055 Local Meeting Ecumenical and Interfaith activities**

At the next Area Meeting, we hope to consider reports about the ecumenical and interfaith work that goes on at Area Meeting level. To develop a fuller picture of activity, we ask Local Meetings to share details about the ecumenical and interfaith groups that they are part of as well as any such activities that Members and Attenders within the Meeting participate in as individuals. Please share responses with the CEQ Office by 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

## **2024.056 Thanks and next meeting**

We thank Selly Oak Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality this evening, Alison Ironside and Stuart Morton for acting as Elders, Fran Wilde for being our Pastoral Friend and Barnaby Waters for supporting with the technology that has allowed us to host a hybrid meeting.

We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> June at Cotteridge Meeting House. There will be a workshop organised by the CEQ Responding to Racism Group between 10.30am and 12.30pm, followed by lunch, then Area Meeting from 2pm until 5pm.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting  
Rae Ritchie, clerk this time