

'NEWS FROM SUFFERINGS'

Report of Meeting for Sufferings, held on Saturday 6th September 2018
at Friends House in London.

Main agenda items for this October meeting included the work of BYM Trustees; Prioritising centrally managed work; Vibrancy in meetings; Diversity and inclusion; BYM investments in Israel/Palestine; and Sustainability: living up to our commitment.

This report focuses just on three of those items, but there were many other interesting and important matters. If you would like to read more, you can find full papers and minutes at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/papers-and-minutes> And 'The Friend' always reports on Sufferings (see 12th October 2018 Vol 176 no 41 for this month, it has a conker on the front!).

We were reminded at the beginning of the day of Isaac Pennington's words in 1667:

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.
(QF&P 10.01)

This was Young People's Participation Day, and it was helpful and inspiring to hear their minute in which we learned that they had focused on issues of diversity and inclusion. Here is a short extract from the end of the minute:

We talked about how we would like older Quakers to approach Young People not as extensions of our families but as individuals. Include us in committees both nationally and locally, but also recognise our varied experience and that for our inclusion elements of meetings may have to change, for example the language used and the times at which they're held.

Friends enthusiastically welcomed a proposal to create four more places at Meeting for Sufferings, reserved for Young Adult Friends aged under thirty-five, for the remainder of the current triennium.

1. Work of Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

The underpinning intention of Trustees was summarised as

A SIMPLE CHURCH SUPPORTED BY A SIMPLE CHARITY

Meeting for Sufferings was glad to hear about Trustees' plans for a more simple charity, as this, in turn, should enable us to be clearer about the development of the life of a simple church. Under the goal of 'Our Faith in the Future', we heard that Trustees are prioritising three main areas of work: thriving Quaker communities; a sustainable peaceful world; and simple structures and practices.

The question is not just *what* is done but also *how* it is done: is the work distinctly Quaker, is it integrated throughout the YM, and is it well-governed? Sufferings encouraged Trustees to take this work forward, while expecting to return to these issues again.

2. BYM investments in Israel/Palestine

There were three positions that Meeting for Sufferings could decide to take:

- To rescind or to affirm the 2011 decision to boycott settlement goods;
- To encourage BYM Trustees to exclude from its investments companies profiting from the occupation of Palestine, and to amend the BYM Investment Policy accordingly;
- To go further and ask Friends to ensure they also exclude from their Meeting and personal investments any companies profiting from the occupation of Palestine.

This proved a difficult item. Clearly one of the main problems would be knowing what companies to exclude; but in an excellent briefing paper we read that the UN Human Rights Council is developing a database of all business enterprises profiting from the occupation, wherever they are based. The database is due to be published early next year.

We were reminded that Quakers have in the past been called to take a stand against a wide range of practices including the slave trade, the arms trade and apartheid in South Africa, and felt the need to affirm our stance against unethical behaviour, wherever and whenever it arises. We reaffirmed our decision made in 2011 to boycott settlement goods, until such time as the Israeli occupation of Palestine is ended, and were glad to hear from BYM Trustees that there are currently no investments in any company profiting from the occupation of

Palestine. We encouraged Trustees to amend their investment policy to ensure that this remains the case, hoping that the UN database will be used. So the first two positions were agreed; but not, at this point, the third position that would go further.

1. Sustainability: living up to our commitment (made in Canterbury, 2011)

In another excellent briefing paper we had learned that there had been a meeting in July bringing together the clerks or other representatives of all those parts of BYM's structures which have a specific involvement in taking forward Yearly Meeting's sustainability commitment. We were asked about four proposals, three of which, relating to the ways in which BYM works, will help to take this work forward more effectively than at present. These three were agreed straight away. The fourth question was as follows:

We need a clear vision and Meeting for Sufferings has asked for leadership. Could the whole yearly meeting commit itself to the bold target of becoming carbon neutral or 'net zero' in carbon? We could set a date significantly earlier than the target date of 2050 being considered by the UK government. This idea emerged during the July meeting. Such a commitment would need to be made by Yearly Meeting in session, and careful research and judgment would be needed before any such decision could be taken.

Is this something MfS would want to see thought through and brought back for consideration?

This was another contentious item. Contributions ranged from a suggestion that we should be careful not to bite off more than we can chew, and that we could pay more attention to Advices and Queries 41 (Try to live simply); to an observation that we are surely "fiddling while Rome burns" and a furious question as to how we proposed to explain such a position on our response to the current planetary crisis, to the young people who were about to join us in this meeting. Part of the eventual minute reads as follows:

The idea of BYM considering a target of becoming carbon neutral or 'net zero' in carbon is a new one and today we feel daunted to go further with this. We have been encouraged to return to the guidance in our Advices 41: 'Try to live simply'.

However it may be invaluable for us all to reflect and consider what it means for us to be zero carbon: for our meetings and for centrally managed work and we ask for further guidance and advice.

This minute was sent to BYM Sustainability Group

In conclusion, there was some emphasis during the day about how Quaker Trustees (of Area Meetings as well as Britain Yearly Meeting) are drawn from ordinary members of AMs and Sufferings, and remain members of those meetings. Trustees are not elevated groups in authority over us; they are drawn from AM and Sufferings members, and every Trustee is also 'one of us'. We were reminded that we need to trust each other and to trust the workings of the spirit in all that we do

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Sheffield and Balby Area Meeting October

