

Transgender inclusion in our Area Meeting, and our meeting houses

In 2017, Meeting for Sufferings (our representative body between Yearly Meetings) received a minute with a statement on transgender and non-binary inclusion from North East Thames Area Meeting (circulated with this information) and made the following minute:

MfS 17/04/15 Transgender and non-binary inclusion

We receive minute 17.21 of North East Thames AM, held on 18 February 2017, attaching a statement concerning the inclusion of transgender and non-binary people in our Quaker communities. We welcome the opportunity to increase our learning about this issue - nonbinary people are those who do not identify as either male or female.

We forward this minute to Quaker Life Central Committee for their consideration.

Soon after this, the UK government announced a consultation on possible reform of the Gender Recognition Act, to make the process of changing legal gender smoother. This led to heated debate in the media and in public spaces, including public meetings to campaign against the reform. Some of these campaigners have campaigned for the removal of existing rights and protections for trans people.

Some of these meetings took place in Quaker Meeting Houses, and some Quaker Meeting Houses (including ours) declined bookings for these campaigning meetings. Decisions to hold or not to hold these meetings were heavily criticised.

In 2018, Quaker Life Central Committee issued a discussion paper (circulated with this information) asking Meetings and individuals to send them minutes and notes of discussions, to help with their discernment. This is the reason for our bringing this matter to Area Meeting.

In February this year, Young Friends General Meeting made a minute with a statement in response to QLCC's request (circulated with this information). Junior Yearly Meeting also considered this matter and united with the YFGM minute.

In our Area Meeting we have had a workshop to consider gender diversity but have not yet discerned a position of our own in relation to trans and non-binary inclusion. Our options at this point could include making a minute with a statement of our own, or uniting with the YFGM statement, or something else we haven't thought of yet.

North East Thames Area Meeting Statements on transgender and non-binary Inclusion

'Facing turbulent times, Quakers in Britain seek a future where Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age. All are heard, valued and supported both in our

needs and our leadings. Everyone's contribution is accepted according to their gifts and resources. All are welcomed and included.'

Our faith in the future (Quakers in Britain, 2015)

Quakers in North East Thames Area Meeting are aware that our community is a continuing creation in which we seek to know and love ourselves and one another in all our differences, united at a profound level in our efforts to reach and respond to others in the things that are eternal.

We want our Local Meeting to be a safe place where each person can come as their own true self and find a spiritual home.

We recognise that there is a growing awareness in society, and in the Society of Friends, that the terms 'man' and 'woman' prove incomplete when describing the diversity of gender identity and experience that exists.

We hope that we can all grow together in our understanding of gender identity.

We want it to be known that our Area Meeting is a place where all are welcomed and nurtured, including people who are transgender and non-binary.

We hope that we can share a spiritual companionship, creating a place where we can all listen to and connect with one another, and accompany one another with love.

North East Thames Area Meeting held 18 February 2017

Discussion document by Quaker Life Central Committee

Quakers and gender diversity Introduction

This statement by Quaker Life Central Committee has emerged as a response to the shared experiences of Friends throughout Britain Yearly Meeting and the sense that it is our responsibility to lead on this. We commit to this being the start of a discussion for the comfort and discomfort of all Friends, with a focus on listening to where the words come from and upholding one another.

We accept that this is where we are now. There is much more to be done and more discussion to be had and this will be a process of careful thought and prayerfulness. We are aware of the pain and hardship around this topic and hold all Meetings in the Light and in our hearts during this exploration. It is essential to remember that we are Friends with each other and to treat ourselves and this sacred community with gentleness and love as we go forth.

An Initial Statement on Gender Diversity by Quaker Life Central Committee

We condemn all forms of bigotry, oppression and discrimination and seek to do all we can to remove such experiences from our Quaker community. Where this is not humanly possible we trust that, with Divine help, we can move forward together in making our Society a truly welcoming place for all. We affirm the right of all to explore their own expressions, non-conformity and identity in matters of gender and sexuality and note that this may involve

clarity, decisiveness, doubt and re-thinking in any individual's life. We commit to providing places of worship and community that are welcoming of all on that journey. While we cannot hope to be perfect in attaining this, we seek to try what love can do.

We note, with sadness, that the current expression of gender diversity across our society has been coloured by bad feeling and hurtful language. We denounce such language and action. We exhort all Friends to consider their every word and deed carefully and lovingly and commit our organisation to work with tenderness to all as we work through this new social territory.

We affirm the right of women's organisations to critique and explore the nature of gender identification and respect their right to freedom of speech. We recognise that some Friends will find such organisations supportive and of comfort and respect their right to make their case. We do not accept that the critique of transgender identities in the political sphere is necessarily transphobic. We affirm our welcome to such organisations to meet publicly or privately on Quaker premises. We will work with all such organisations to address any potential uses of hurtful language.

We affirm the right of organisations that support transgender individuals, and all exploring their gender identity, to all such activities in pursuit of this, and respect their right to freedom of speech. We recognise that some Friends will find such organisations supportive and of comfort and respect their right to make their case. We affirm our welcome to such organisations to meet publicly or privately on Quaker premises. We will work with all such organisations to address any potential uses of hurtful language. As a Quaker community, we respect and uphold the self-expression of all members of and visitors to our community. We commit to using and respecting individuals' current names and pronouns.

In all our work with children and young people in our community, we respect and uphold their self-expressions and seek to offer them nurturing spaces in which to continue to grow and develop. We recognise that such self-expressions may change over time and that exploration of identity and conformity or otherwise to gender norms is a normal part of youth and may continue throughout life. We commit to offering our children and young people affirming activities and spaces which are not gender stereotyped and allow each individual freedom of self-expression that is appropriate for them at that time.

We note that shared spaces such as toilets, changing and sleeping areas can cause anxieties and concerns for people. We believe that no-one should have to use shared spaces which do not feel comfortable to them. In a context of systemic male violence, particularly towards women, we are especially minded to examine the potential adverse impact of any policy on women and girls and to make efforts to remedy this. All Quaker premises and events ought to provide facilities which everyone feels safe and comfortable using. The usage of these facilities must be clearly defined and communicated and must offer choice for the individual.

Throughout our history, Quakers have affirmed the equality of all before God. We profess that 'each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God' (Advices and Queries 22). We commit to continue our work in this matter, continually seeking new solutions to eradicate all forms of exclusion and to create safe space for all within Britain Yearly Meeting.

What next?

We invite Friends to reflect and discuss the topic together. We also invite Friends across Britain to send personal stories and think-pieces to us – contributions will help us learn, and to consider whether to draw together some form of publication. Notes or minutes of discussions in Quaker communities could also be sent, as this will help us understand more about this exploration, and whether further resources might be helpful.

We're not inviting 'dots and commas' comments on the present text. Please send any response, with your name, address, and the name of your Area Meeting (or other Quaker community) to us at gender@quaker.org.uk, or to Gender responses, Quaker Life, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. This email address will not be monitored regularly and we do not expect to enter into correspondence with those making submissions, but you will be contacted if we wish to publish any response you send.

Quaker Life Central Committee, November 2018

Young Friends General Meeting statement

Introduction

As Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM), we have been aware of, and sometimes troubled by, the growing conversation in Quakerism about trans and non-binary identities. Relative to cis people (whose gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth), trans and non-binary people face unique challenges, ranging from difficulty obtaining adequate medical care to navigating social spaces that do not accommodate deviation from traditional views of gender. Too often, those challenges continue in local meetings, where – generally driven much more by a lack of information and understanding rather than any desire to hurt – Friends don't always succeed in being inclusive.

Last year several Quaker meetings hosted events by 'gender critical' groups, who use the position that gender is solely a social construct to argue for the exclusion of trans people, particularly women, all too often through fear and misinformation. But questions of when meetings should accept or reject bookings are secondary to asking what our testimony to equality means in the context of trans rights.

Last May, YFGM affirmed the right of everyone to self-identify their gender, recognising all genders as valid and real. Young Friends' powerful and emotive ministry made it clear we still had work to do.

The minute adopted in May 2018 read:

2018.20 Trans and non-binary inclusion (2)

We affirm the right of everyone to self-identify their gender and recognise all genders as valid and real.

YFGM aims to be a welcoming and accessible space for people of all gender identities where people feel included and oppressive behaviour is not accepted.

We recognise we have further work to do including some more immediate changes, and creating space to nurture deeper cultural changes within both YFGM and the

wider Society of Friends.

As a next step we agree to hold a Special Interest Gathering, open to everyone, to further our discernment around this topic, after which we will consider the next steps of our community's journey.

This February, YFGM adopted the minute below, including our values statement. We offer this to the Society with excitement and hope, noting our joy as a community to affirm our love and inclusion of all friends of diverse genders within and beyond the gender binary.

This is not YFGM's last word on the subject. We are committed to fostering a spirit of loving unity within Quakerism. We want to support all Friends in learning about gender diversity, build intergenerational conversations, and make the events we run inclusive of everyone, trans or cis, binary or non-binary.

Minute of YFGM, February 2019

a) Trans and non-binary inclusion

Further to minutes 2018.16 and 2018.18, we have heard from Jane Booth, about November's special interest gathering on Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion.

We have heard the statement produced by that gathering. We as YFGM adopt this statement with minor amendments (wording in Minute part (b) below). We are joyful as a community to affirm our love and inclusion of all friends of diverse genders within and beyond the gender binary.

We commit to the following practical actions:

- Making our value statement clearly available on the website
- To support Friends in the wider society of Friends to learn about gender diversity and trans inclusion. This may be by providing education to society as a whole, perhaps as special interest groups at BYM, or fact sheets. This may be new material or existing material which could be publicised on the YFGM website. To support Intergenerational conversations on the subject, carefully facilitated; we have heard that this work may be taken on by the engaging young adult Quaker programme.
- Provide supporting evidence for trans friends within the YFGM community while the current gender recognition act requires such submission.
- We would like to take all steps possible to ensure that all our YFGM meetings are held in a trans inclusive spaces. This includes taking our trans friends into consideration when we book meeting houses, providing gender neutral bathrooms and ensuring any gendered spaces are explicitly trans inclusive.

We have heard an introduction by Sam to the QLCC statement. We agree that we would like to formally respond to this statement as YFGM, urging QLCC to take note of our value statement, and making clear the points at which we believe the two statements contradict. In particular, we note our disagreement with the position that "the critique of transgender identities in the political sphere is not necessarily transphobic".

We agree to send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings and Quaker Life Central Committee, along with context from the report from the special interest gathering. We thank those Friends who have contributed to bringing this before the community.

b) YFGM Value Statement on Trans and non-binary inclusion

We believe that each person has the right to determine for themselves what gender identities and expressions are most comfortable and authentic for them. We recognize that each member of our community has a unique and deeply personal experience of gender, and that the expression of this is a form of living truthfully and of witness.

As Friends — both trans and cis, binary and non-binary — we affirm that there is no conflict between trans inclusion, feminism, and liberation from gender roles and stereotypes. We do not support the use of meeting houses to host events which claim otherwise, and we hope that Meetings will decide not to host these events in future.

The Society of Friends should be welcoming and affirming of trans and non-binary people. We commit to fostering change to this effect and to bringing YFGM and the Society of Friends closer to this ideal.

We encourage Friends engaging in this conversation going forwards to consider the message of A&Q#22: “Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgments about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.”