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Young Friends General Meeting, 1046 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6LJ
yfgm@quaker.org.uk - 0121 472 1998 - www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk
registered charity number 1064763

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Links

Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM): (the central offices of Quakers in Britain) Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ
Phone: 020 7663 1000. Website: www.quaker.org.uk

Europe & Middle East Young Friends (EMEYF): Square Ambiorix 50, 1000 Brussels, Belgium. Phone 0032 2 230 4935. Fax 0032 2 230 6370. Email: emeyf@qcea.org

Young Quaker Magazine: Subscriptions are available please contact the YFGM Office.

Pardshaw Young Friends Centre: Pardshaw Hall, Cockermouth CA11 0SP. All enquiries and bookings via the YFGM Office.

Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre: Short courses on all aspects of Quakerism and other topics. 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham, B29 6LJ. Phone: 0121 4725171. Website: www.woodbrooke.org.uk

Contacts

If you want to find out more or to join us on our next weekend then get in touch with our office - send us an email or visit our website.
Write to:

YFGM Co-ordinator

Young Friends General Meeting Office
Woodbrooke
1046 Bristol Road
Birmingham
B29 6LJ

Phone/Fax: 0121 472 1998

Email: yfgm@quaker.org.uk

Website: <http://www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk/>

Guide to Acronyms

BYC	British Youth Council
BYM	Britain Yearly Meeting
CYPC	Children and Young People’s Committee (of Quaker Life)
EMES	Europe and Middle East Section (of FWCC)
EMEYF	Europe and Middle East Young Friends
FWCC	Friends World Committee for Consultation
GM	General meeting
MM	Monthly Meeting
NFPB	Northern Friends Peace Board
Noms Comm	Nominations Committee
PM	Preparative Meeting
QAAD	Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs
QCEA	Quaker Council for European Affairs
QLGF	Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship
QPSW	Quaker Peace and Social Witness
QUNO	Quaker United Nations Office
QYT	Quaker Youth Theatre – part of the Leavers
WGYF	World Gathering of Young Friends
YFGM	Young Friends General Meeting
YFNG	Young Friends National Gathering
YQ	Young Quaker magazine
YF	Young Friend

Introduction

What is YFGM?

Welcome to Young Friends General Meeting. We hope this guide will tell you a bit more about who we are and what we do.

Young Friends General Meeting is the national organisation for Young Quakers in Britain. YFGM organizes a number of events that enable Young Friends from around Britain to get together for social and spiritual gatherings.

Our main events are the three General Meetings which take place at Quaker meeting houses around the country in February, May and October each year. These weekends are open to anyone aged between 18 and 30ish who is a Quaker, or interested in Quakerism, to meet like minded people and find out more about what Young Friends do.

YFGM weekends provide an opportunity to discuss the concerns of young Friends. They are also a time to meet up with old friends and make new ones, time to consider our lives, to worship together and to have fun.

All are welcome to come to YFGM.

“

YFGM feels like my spiritual community, it gives me friends who I can share my spiritual journey with and friends who I can share my whole life with.

”

The History of Young Friends Central Committee and Young Friends General Meeting

Young Friends General Meeting began in 1911, first as Young Friends Committee and later as Young Friends Central Committee (YFCC). Originally it was a body of young Friends representing all the Monthly Meetings in Britain. Although many Monthly Meetings still appoint representatives it is now open to all; members, attenders, those who've been connected with Friends all their lives and those new to Quakerism. All are welcome at YFGM. In 1993 YFCC changed it's name to Young Friends General Meeting to reflect the change from a representative committee to an open community.

“

Each generation of Young Friends by its experiments must discover for itself the truths on which the Society is built if it is to use those to continue and enlarge the the work of the Society. Hence the occasional separate meetings of young Friends and our desire to have means of expressing corporately our own experience.

”

Young Friends Committee 1926

Preparative Meeting: Business meeting for an individual meeting.

Quaker: Informal name for a member of the Religious Society of Friends. It comes from a quote from a magistrate called Justice Bennett who 'first called us Quaker' in 1650 'because we bid them tremble at the word of God'. Originally intended to put down Quakers, it stuck, and we learned to like it.

Quaker Faith and Practice (QF&P): A collection of Quaker thought and words as well as guidelines on the right ordering of Quaker affairs. It is revised every generation to reflect continuing revelation and understanding of the Spirit.

Quaker Life: A department of Friends House responsible for Outreach, work with Children and Young People, Eldership & Oversight and other work aimed at supporting the life of meetings.

Quaker Peace and Social Witness: A Friends House department responsible for Quaker work in the areas of peace non- violence and promoting economic and social justice.

Testimony: Testimonies are expressions of key principles which underpin the activities of Quakers in their daily lives, and form the basis of the work of Quakers. They are not fixed written statements of belief. They are the expressions of attitudes by which Quakers try to live their lives. They include equality, simplicity, peace and Integrity and truth.

Right Ordering: Things being done in the correct manner, and in keeping with tradition and Quaker practice.

Weighty Friend: One who is influential within the Society (in the sense that their opinion carries weight).

Friend: Formal name for a Quaker. The Society's full name is the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain.

Friends House: The central offices of BYM, a large building opposite Euston Station in London.

General Meeting: Usually used to describe a business meeting for a large area covering several Monthly Meetings. Young Friends General Meeting cover the whole of Britain.

Member: A person who has formally joined the Religious Society of Friends. At present Friends become Members of their Monthly Meeting.

Meeting: Can be used as shorthand for Meeting for Worship or to refer to the Friends (including members and attenders) who go to a particular meeting.

Meeting for Worship: The Quaker form of worship does not include liturgy or ritual. Quakers believe that when we gather together in silence we can engage in a direct and personal relationship with God (although God may be defined in a variety of ways).

Meeting for Sufferings: The executive body of Britain Yearly Meeting. It is comprised of representatives from each Monthly Meeting (and two from YFGM) and meets regularly at Friends House. It is responsible for decision making and administration for BYM between yearly Meetings.

Monthly Meeting: A Business meeting for a small area of the country. Usually held monthly. Comprised of representatives of Preparative Meetings.

Overseer: A member of a meeting appointed to care for the general well being of all those within a Meeting often on a practical level.

Peace Testimony: The most well known of the Quaker testimonies: the shared view that there is 'that of God' in everyone leads Quakers to witness against war and killing and to work positively to remove the causes of conflict and injustice.

What happens at YFGM?

Main sessions

The main sessions at YFGM cover a wide range of topics including: the running of YFGM; financial matters and how we raise and use our funds; planning the other events we organise and hearing reports from various committees and from our representatives on other bodies. There is also an opportunity to discuss the concerns of Young Friends and people are encouraged to share any ideas and concerns they may have. There are visiting speakers who come to talk about various issues: peace, the environment, social justice and issues of importance to Quakers in Britain.



Quaker Business Method

YFGM makes decisions using the Quaker business method and our meetings are held in the spirit of Quaker worship. Our final decisions are an attempt to reflect the guidings of the spirit.

The meeting begins with silence. An item will then be introduced, giving any necessary background information. There is then time for brief factual questions before the clerks invite responses from the meeting. People who wish to speak stand and wait to be acknowledged by the clerk. This process is not a debate or discussion – it is important to listen to and value each contribution equally and to be open to new ideas and new insights from wherever they may come. We may express contradictory views, but we do not argue with one another in meeting.

The business method works more easily when we remain open-minded, considerate and sensitive to each other. Each individual's contribution is considered carefully until the meeting reaches a decision that everyone accepts as the will of God. Although this may take a lot of time, it's needed if the goal of unity and collective responsibility in decision-making is to be achieved.

When the clerks feel that there is a sense of unity in the meeting, they draft a minute that they offer to the meeting, this might be modified and eventually agreed by the meeting as expressing the meeting's decision, A chorus of 'hope so' indicates agreement with the suggested minute.

We observe silence between individuals' contributions. These silences are crucial as they give the meeting a chance to reflect on what has been said. It is especially important to 'uphold' the Clerks by remaining silent while they are drafting a minute.

Jargon Buster

Acronyms and jargon are everywhere in the Quaker world. Hopefully this will help you to understand some of them.

Advices and Queries: A short collection of questions and suggestions which Quakers use to help them think, pray and reflect on their spiritual lives. It is also part of Quaker Faith and Practice.

Attender: Anyone who regularly goes to a meeting but hasn't formally become a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

Birthright: People born to Quaker parents used to be automatically members from birth. It is now loosely used to describe a Friend born of Quaker parents. Nowadays most people join after reflecting on membership for themselves. You can join at any age.

Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM): A meeting for decision making and administration for Friends in England, Scotland and Wales. Also used to describe to both the whole body of Quakers in Britain.

Clerk: The Clerk is appointed to take a meeting through its business and to write the minutes. It is a role is similar to those of a chairperson and secretary combined.

Concern: An idea or prompting by the Spirit which leads a Friend to take a particular interest in an issue. The concern will probably be brought to a business meeting to be 'tested' to see if it is a true concern.

Convincement: Used to describe anybody who joins the Society of Friends, means a discovery by the individual of the truth of the Quaker way for them.

Elder: A Member of a Meeting appointed with ordering the spiritual life of the meeting and ensuring that ministry or business is conducted 'in right ordering'. YFGM does not have Elders but Quintessential are responsible for ensuring business sessions are conducted according to the Quaker Business method.

Young Friends Appeal

YFGM may choose to support a particular concern by adopting it as our Appeal.

A small group of Friends organises fundraising events, including collections at local meetings, tea parties, selling appeal t-shirts or even kitting woolly socks. The Appeal changes more or less every year. Recent appeals have supported adult survivors of sexual abuse, the 'Little Star' psychosocial rehabilitation centre for children traumatised by the war in Chechnya and an ecumenical organisation working with people with mental or emotional difficulties.

Young Quaker Magazine

YFGM also produces Young Quaker, a monthly magazine. It's packed with news, articles, details of job and volunteer opportunities, and details of lots of events for Young Friends and importantly changes of address. Subscribing to YQ is a great way to keep in touch with what's going on and what current issues are of interest to Young Friends. If you're interested in writing either critically or creatively, it's a great place to air your views and see your poems, stories, articles and cartoons in print. The editors of YQ are appointed by YFGM.

If you want to subscribe then contact the YFGM Office for a free sample copy and a subscription form. Alternatively you may be able to find copies at your local Meeting House. Registration Forms for the next YFGM are always printed in YQ.

In the same way that you would normally minister once during Meeting for Worship it is normal to only speak once unless we are responding to a direct question or giving factual information.

If you feel moved to speak on an item then it is important to remember the following points:

- Stand up and wait for the Clerks to acknowledge you
- Say your name before you begin
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Try to avoid using acronyms and jargon
- Keep your ministry short and to the point.

The most effective ministry is simple, honest and from your own experience

Get involved

Young Friends General Meeting is all about participation. Quakers believe there is that of God in everyone and that we all have something to offer. Because of this everyone is encouraged to share their ideas and concerns at YFGM. There is the space to be as involved as you want to be.

“ YFGM enables Young Friends, individually and collectively to gain a feeling of being an important piece in a huge jigsaw of Quaker activity; reflecting the business, events, concerns aims and aspirations of Young Quakers. ”

Testing Concerns

There may be a particular issue about which you feel strongly – peace or social justice for example. You can bring this concern to YFGM (perhaps initially by running a Special Interest Group about it) where it will be considered and may be taken forward as a concern of General Meeting with an opportunity for the issue to be explored in greater depth.



Worship

Worship is an important part of our time together. Each business session begins in worship and we try to keep that spirit throughout. We also have times specifically for worship: each evening we gather for epilogue – this is a quiet time for worship and reflection at the end of a long and hectic day which may include some prepared input such as a reading or some music. We also join local Friends at the meeting house where we are staying for Meeting for Worship on Sunday.

Summer Event

Each year YFGM also organises a small event during the summer. In the past there have been camping events,, both with and without themes, a pilgrimage to 1652 country in Northern England – the area known as the birthplace of Quakerism, and an event focused on the environment, the earth and sustainable practices, These events normally last for a week and includes worship and workshops, fun and lots of free time, and a chance to make and deepen friendships as well as explore issues.



Pardshaw Young Friends Centre

Pardshaw Young Friends Centre is a Meeting House near Cockermouth in the Lake District, which is run as a hostel by YFGM. Members of YFGM and their friends can stay there very cheaply at any time of year and the Pardshaw Committee organises gatherings twice a year; just before Christmas for a long weekend and in the spring or summer for a week.

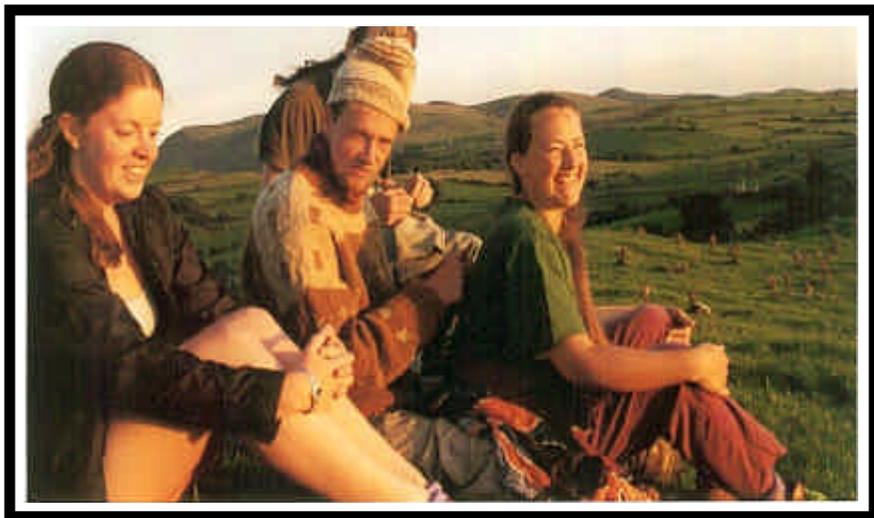
Beyond YFGM

Other Events

As well as our General Meetings Young Friends organise a number of other events throughout the year. These events are more informal but often have a theme and may have speakers and small discussion groups. These events give Friends the opportunity to explore issues or concerns in greater depth than is possible at YFGM. The topics explored at these gatherings often reflect issues of relevance to young people and concerns that Young Friends feel strongly about.

Young Friends National Gathering

Young Friends National Gathering (YFNG) is an approximately annual event that gives a chance to explore a particular theme in depth. Past themes have included pastoral care, Young Friends' commitment and belonging, Mental Health issues and an alternative Bible study weekend.



Special Interest Groups

Special Interest Groups are small discussion and activity groups that happen during YFGM. They are scheduled in between the main sessions so that everyone is free to participate. Topics vary from Bible study to juggling, frisbee playing to concern about the environment. These groups give an opportunity to test out concerns and explore issues in greater depth than is sometimes possible in sessions and anyone can volunteer to lead one. Often the Groups on offer reflect what is on the agenda for that particular YFGM. They may arise out of an item in a business session or be used for preparatory thinking before an item comes before the whole of General Meeting.

“ *It's my weekend of peace, my weekend when I get away and get back to what I want to be doing.* ”

Meeting people & having fun

Having fun is an important part of YFGM. Entertainments are planned for the evenings after business is finished with. In the past we've had cabarets, ceilidhs and many other strange and wonderful events.

YFGM can appear to be a business weekend where Young Friends gather to hear about and oversee Quaker events which they are involved with, and hear about what else is going on in within Britain Yearly Meeting. It certainly serves this function but when you scratch the surface and look a little deeper you find a number of different levels. There is a quite different social side which exists for whatever purpose you choose to – whether reconnecting with old friends, having engaging discussions or having fun and laughing together.

What it's like

YFGM is a place where Young Friends can come together and say, individually and together 'this is what is important to us and this is why' – whatever that particular concern may be. At YFGM, Young Friends find others who share many of our values and visions. We may already be eager to take action to change the way we live, or the wider world. At YFGM however we often feel that our dreams are more likely to be realised if we work together as Young Quakers with a visible presence within the Society of Friends and in the world.

There is space within YFGM for everyone to express themselves, their ideas and their faith and, importantly, individuals feel involved in something that is for many an important part of their lives.

“

I like the fact that I can gain inspiration and knowledge of God from anyone I meet at YFGM

”

Who goes to YFGM?

It's hard to describe an 'average' YFGMer, but there are lots of vegetarians, lots of people concerned about peace, social and development issues, a mixture of students, unemployed and earners. Although Quakerism is rooted in Christianity, many Young Friends also draw inspiration from other religions, from nature and from those around us. Because Quakers believe that a religion is a way of life rather than just something for Sunday mornings many people also focus on the way we live in the world and in living responsibly with consideration for others and the environment.

Outreach Committee

Outreach Committee is responsible for publicising YFGM activities to Young Quakers and others who may be interested in attending. It is also responsible for informing the Society of Friends about Young Friends events and the concerns of Young Quakers. It produces booklets and leaflets (like this one) and holds an annual Enquirers' Gathering. It has a stand at Britain Yearly Meeting (the annual gathering of Quakers in Britain) each year and often visits festivals and other events during the summer. Outreach Committee also includes the International Secretary, who is responsible for contact with other Young Friends' groups around the world, and the Interchurch/Interfaith Secretary who is responsible for maintaining links with other churches and other faiths.

YFGM Representatives

YFGM has representatives on the main central Quaker bodies – and also on youth organisations, including the British Youth Council. YFGM exists to give Young Friends a voice at a national level within Britain Yearly Meeting and also to make a public witness of our faith and beliefs outside the Society of Friends. It is often seen as a barometer for what young Friends are thinking about and YFGM is asked for input into issues being considered by the wider Society of Friends.

“

I get so much from going to the weekends, it's always like going to a quiet peaceful island after the busyness of my everyday life. It provides a space where I can reflect on what I am doing and which direction I want to take next. It's lovely having a kind of extended family who I get to visit three times a year.

”

Overseers

Overseers are responsible for the smooth running of Young Friends General Meeting outside business and for the 'pastoral care' of those attending YFGM. The overseers arrive early and prepare the Meeting House for YFGM, this includes sticking up notices and sorting people into small groups. They are also responsible for organising entertainments. As General Meeting has residential meetings that vary in attendance and location, the role of overseer changes to cater for the specific needs of each gathering.

Nominations Committee

The Quaker business method is used to determine who should be appointed to the various posts within YFGM, committees and as representatives to other organisations. The meeting as a whole discerns who would be appropriate and there are no elections or votes. To save time considering all the possible people who might be appropriate to fill a particular position, Nominations Committee is a small group that takes on the responsibility of bringing the names of the people it feels would be most suitable for the various posts within YFGM.. These names are finally considered by the whole meeting which then makes an appointment.

Finance Committee

Finance Committee is made up of all the treasurers for various groups within YFGM as well as the General Fund Treasurer, the Employment Treasurer and a fund-raiser. Finance Committee is responsible for fund-raising and managing the finances of YFGM. Our funds come from donations from Friends and local Meetings all over the country, grants from trusts and from Britain Yearly Meeting, and donations made by Young Friends' at our events.

Management Group

Management Group are responsible for managing the Coordinator (YFGM's part-time employee) and for overseeing the running of the YFGM office.

“ For me YFGM is about spending time with people like me and people who are like what I'd like to be. ”



“ For people who are 'seeking' it's a very good place to be. ”

Organising YFGM

The Coordinator and the YFGM office

Because YFGM only happens three times a year, a number of people are appointed by YFGM to organise YFGM and other events, and to further our concerns between meetings. As well as this YFGM employs a part-time Coordinator, based in our office at Woodbrooke, (the Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham).

The Coordinator is responsible for much of the administration and day-to-day running of YFGM. The Coordinator and the office serve as a focus for communication between Young Friends and the Officers and Committees, it is always a good first point of contact – contact details are at the back of this leaflet.

The Officers

The Officers are a small group with a particular responsibility for arranging the agenda for each YFGM, booking a Meeting House and planning the weekend. They are also the Trustees of Young Friends' General Meeting. The Officers are:

Co-clerks: The two clerks coordinate the business in YFGM sessions. They are responsible for discerning decisions and writing minutes. The Co-clerks also serve on other Committees, including the Coordinator's Management Group.

General Fund Treasurer: The General Fund Treasurer (GFT) is responsible for overseeing YFGM's finances, how we raise and spend our money. The GFT is also the Convenor of Finance Committee.

Co-convenors of Overseers: Overseers organise the practical side of arrangements for YFGM and offer pastoral support. They are also responsible for coordinating entertainments.

Convenor of Nominations Committee: Responsible for coordinating the committee that suggests names for appointments to YFGM.

Officer of Outreach: The Officer of Outreach convenes Outreach Committee and oversees YFGMs Outreach programme.

Convenor of Officers: The convenor of officers is responsible for arranging and coordinating Officers weekends and for booking Meeting Houses for YFGM. At YFGM they are responsible for overseeing Special Interest Groups, and finding volunteers to do catering and other one-off jobs for the next YFGM

Committees and what they do

Quintessential

An abbreviation of Quakers United In Nurturing Traditional Expression of Salient, Stylish, Essential and Thoughtful Ideas for Action and Learning

Quintessential are responsible for helping YFGM to use the Quaker business method effectively. This is the method that Quakers use for deliberation and decision making through seeking the will of God on the matter under consideration.

They help people preparing and presenting business items. They are also responsible for organising epilogue and other worship sessions. At the start of each YFGM Quintessential present an introduction to the Quaker business method.