

Who Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM) is

YFGM is the national community of young adults who are members, attenders of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) or individuals who are interested in Quakerism. Young Friends events tend to be residential weekends that happen three times a year at Quaker meeting houses, in 2014 our main meetings happened in Manchester, Birmingham (Woodbrooke) and Nottingham. These meetings provide an opportunity to spend time together as a community and explore our faith and ways of living out the Quaker testimonies of truth, simplicity, equality and peace. In addition to the normal three meetings smaller groups of members have been lucky to meet up in Buckinghamshire for a weekend focused around mental wellbeing and an informal weekend of fun in Yealands.

Objectives

The three objectives that set out the purpose of YFGM are contained within the charities constitution. The principal objective is the advancement of religion in accordance with the principles and practices of the Religious Society of Friends commonly called Quakers. The other two objectives are the advancement of any concerns adopted by our meetings and any charitable objectives deemed as such by the charity commission and adopted at the discretion of the charities trustees.

Governance

The below is a list of the trustees who were active in 2014:

Convenor of Trustees: Rachael Swancott Boon (10/2012- 02/2015)

Finance Trustee: Alyn Still (02/2013-05/2016)

Management Trustee: Jessica Methingham (02/2014) and Jenny McCarthy (02/2014-01/2017)

Clerk: Brigid Stoney (05/2013- 05/2016)

Clerk: Peter Doubtfire (05/2014-05/2017)

Quintessential trustee Ericka Smith (10/2013-10/2015)

All trustees have specific responsibilities. The convenor of trustees is responsible for the smooth running of the committee of trustees and acts as the chair. There are two clerks, who are responsible for the business sessions at YFGM. The finance trustee takes lead responsibility for the financial management of the charity, management trustee is responsible for the operation of YFGM office and the coordinator intern, Quintessential trustee acts as a link between the trustees and the Quinty committee who acts as elders they nurture the spiritual life of YFGM. Trustees are appointed by the wider community through the Quaker Nominations process (explained below) with the exception of the Quinty trustee who is brought forward by the committee that they are a member of.

The Quaker nomination process starts by the meeting identifying that a task is needed to be performed; a nominations committee exists within YFGM that is made up of 9 members and is representative of the larger meeting. At the main YFGM weekends the committee is active and open to suggestions for the roles that are releasing their current holders. The nominations committee meets to discern in the spirit of worship. In between meetings of the nomination committee, individual members approach those who have been suggested for roles and reveal that their name has been put forward for the job. The discussion is mainly to establish whether the person understands the role and whether they are fit and able to assume the role within the organisation. Once the spirit has led the committee to decide that the individual suggested is suitable the name is taken forward to a meeting of all members in attendance of that gathering, the meeting as a whole has the responsibility to approve the name and have the opportunity to express any doubts.

The running of YFGM depends on volunteers who are members. This means that they are passionate and committed to making sure that resources are available to deliver our objectives. In addition to the six active trustees there are 34 volunteers that contribute to the running of YFGM. Although volunteers are keen to serve the meeting we fully acknowledge the limitations of being a volunteer organisation. Awareness of the limitations has allowed us to plan ahead to avoid the consequences. One example would be the time commitment that being a volunteer involves; when a person is nominated for a role we make them aware of what the role involves including the time it takes to fulfil their responsibilities. In addition we emphasise the importance of saying no to the nomination if they feel that they are not fit and able.

Volunteering is a way that members of YFGM can contribute to the life of our meeting but another way is to participate in the business sessions at the main gathering. YFGM activities are guided by its members. Business items are presented concerning how the charity uses its money to sustain ourselves, how we can support other organisations and how we transform our concerns into action.. The member who has brought the item to the meetings attention is given time to present facts and information that will assist in the discernment process. When an item is introduced as business to a meeting of our members we are attempting to gain Gods guidance on the matter by method of discernment, if a member feels that they have something to add to the item, they are given opportunity to provide spoken ministry to the rest of the gathering. Similarly to all Quaker meetings, YFGM do not vote on an item but it is down to the clerk to discern the meetings united mind and write the minute that encapsulates this.

We have specific weekends dedicated to the planning of YFGM business meetings. This is where all committees gather to discuss issues that arise with the next event. The planning weekend before Manchester an important trustees meeting happened, where one of our members brought to our attention that our standards were slipping in terms of compliance with the data protection act and the health and safety executive. We are grateful for this members input and are working towards putting into place strategies to improve our compliance.

Key events in 2014

- The formal adoption of concerns about the trident nuclear weapon programme and mental health within and outside our community since 2006.

- It has been a year since we have transitioned from a paid member of staff to an internship. We have benefitted from the intern working for both us and British Yearly meeting, as it has given us a connection with the wider Quaker community. In addition the intern has acted as a single point of contact for members and other prospective attendees to our events.
- YFGM at Woodbrooke
- YFGM free events at Yealands and Buckinghamshire

Activities

The activities of YFGM promote the development of our witness in the world; our faith springs from deeply held beliefs and spiritual insight. The Quaker testimonies of truth, simplicity, justice, equality, peace and faithful living shape discussions that are facilitated in the safe environment that YFGM provides. We often have speakers come to provide their experience of putting faith into action. In Manchester in February we were visited by Peter Austin of Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB). NFPB is Quaker organisation formed before the First World War; it actively encourages Quakers to promote peace. The talk that YFGM was provided was one about the history of the organisation. This helped strengthen the relationship between us and YFGM in addition to having members that represent YFGM within NFPB.

Similarly to peace and nuclear weapons, YFGM has consistently held sessions relating to mental health and wellbeing. This theme has continued from a special interest group that was held about mental health in 2013. In Manchester a session was facilitated by Imran Tyabrij that helped us consider our own personal journey, nourishing our spiritual wellbeing and helping us to reflect on how we see ourselves as Quakers. A member of staff from the psychiatric hospital called the retreat ran a session about the history of the hospital and how early Quakers approached the treatment of mental health in a pioneering manner. In between Woodbrooke and Nottingham a weekend was organised by a group of our members that was focused around mental health and wellbeing. The purpose of the weekend was to explore the factors that maintain, nourish and develop our personal mental health. A passion was shared for mental health care and it was felt that there was energy to do something.

Over the year of 2014 we have seen the development of members concerns for both trident and mental health and it has led our members to feel that they need to put their faith in to action in relation to these topics. The issues were presented to YFGM business sessions in Nottingham and it collectively decided to formally adopt these concerns.

In May we had the privilege of our normal residential weekend being held in the Quaker study centre in Birmingham. This centre used to be George Cadburys home and gave us a link to our past but also an environment where our community could once again flourish. As usual a diversity of sessions was run, including business sessions, spirituality sessions and special interest groups. YFGM is part of the wider community of Quakers within British Yearly meeting (BYM). In 2013 BYM adopted the concern of sustainability. A business session held at Woodbrooke saw YFGM respond to this concern. This session asked our members to reflect on the meaning of sustainability and consequences of certain choices that we make, how we can support one another in our communities to live more sustainably and methods that can be employed to be more efficient activists in this area.

One of the additional weekends organised by members of YFGM was held in the old Quaker school in Yealands. This was predominantly a social weekend but the attenders could not go without paying attention to the significance of the area to the history of Quakerism.

Looking forward

Leading on from the trustees meeting that happened during the planning weekend before YFGM in Manchester. We have now made sure that there is a designated first aider at every weekend. We are now making use of the photography policy and have made sure that medical records are kept out of sight and locked away if not in the presence of the person needing access to the information.

We look forward to the prospect of momentum being gathered with both our trident and mental concern. 2015 should see working groups nominated and we look forward to the journey we are set to embark on together. This is the first time YFGM has formally adopted concerns since 2006 with our commitment to fair trade products. Sessions led in Nottingham by Action Awe and BASIC will hopefully assist the working group in identifying the way forward for the trident concern, as it explored the barriers faced when opposing trident.

Written by Kellie Turner- Convenor of Trustees 2015-2018