

## **Aims and Purposes**

Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM) provides a national community to young adults (adults of 18 to 30ish years of age) who are members or attenders of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) or individuals who are interested in the principles and practices of Quakers. The overall aim of YFGM is the advancement of religion in accordance with the principles and practices of the Quakers. As part of this work, we seek to advance any corporate concerns adopted by our meeting, and charitable objectives, as defined by the charity commission, undertaken at the discretion of the meeting. Through a shared life and worship YFGM seeks to give our members and attenders a space to explore and develop our faith, and our ways of living out the principles and testimonies of Quakerism in practice. The principal objective of Young Friends General Meeting is set out in our constitution updated in May 1997 as "The advancement of religion in accordance with the principles and practices of the Religious Society of Friends commonly called Quakers".

## **Objectives and Activities**

The core activity of YFGM is the running of three residential weekends a year, predominantly within Quaker meeting houses around the UK. In these meetings, attenders gather to worship together, attend speaker and special interest sessions, discuss and work on concerns that members hold, develop their spirituality, talk about their experience of the divine, socialise and build community, and attend the business sessions which keep the general meeting running and allow it to serve its function as a representative body within Britain Yearly Meeting, the overarching organisation of the Religious Society of Friends in Great Britain. Special interest meetings and more informal gatherings supplement these residential meetings. Through the activities of the General Meeting, our members help one another to deepen their understanding of Quakerism, and to live out the Quaker testimonies of equality, simplicity, truthfulness and peace. When planning our activities, the trustees maintain a level of oversight to ensure public benefit is considered, in line with the Commission's guidance on the benefit created by charities for the advancement of religion.

## **Achievements and Performance**

### *Residential Gatherings*

In 2017 YFGM held residential gatherings in Edinburgh, Sheffield and Bristol.

In February, we gathered in Edinburgh for our first YFGM in Scotland in over a decade. With 20 newcomers, there was a vibrant energy from games on Friday evening to the epic entertainments on Saturday. We had a wide range of Special Interest Groups, and were lucky to hear people's different experiences and areas of interest. Learning about the work of several peace charities was heartening as always

in our current global situation, and taking part in research about Quaker Concerns got us thinking about our experiences and knowledge of this aspect of being a Quaker community. Laying down our own Concern against Trident made us realise the importance of the work the group has achieved and that we still feel strongly about this issue. Newcomers got to know each other through silly games with food, and learned about YFGM's proud tradition of Quaker business method. David Day, Margo Lunnon and Jeff Beatty spoke to us about Quaker Values in Education. We are troubled by some of the recent trends in education policy, and making a list of problems was not difficult. Finding solutions will not be so easy, but we hope that education systems can be developed which nurture that of God in every child. Quintessential (our committee of Elders) led us in a creative exploration of multi-faith texts. The sacred writings of other faiths can be challenging as well as throwing new perspectives on our Quaker faith. Epilogues, worship and preparation for worship helped us to make the community our home for the weekend, a sense strengthened by sharing meals, friendship and cups of tea.

In May, we gathered on a hot bank holiday weekend in Sheffield to get to know one another through worship, listening, games, work and food. We spent some time together imagining island utopias and thought about what sort of community we would create. How would we eat, learn, worship and look after one another? Would we seek and accept contact with the world beyond ours? We also took part in a world café-style conversations around the topics of community, home, why we come to YFGM and Christianity in Quakerism. The time and space in which we listen to one another's thoughts and experiences is a precious gift for our community. We value the chance to begin conversations we hope to carry on. We connected across an ocean (via video link) with young Friends from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in the USA. Hearing their stories of creating and working with conflict and change within their yearly meeting was eye-opening and made us think about our own situation within BYM. We hope to further the connection with inspiration and mutual support from the young Friends community we have met. Speakers from Veterans for Peace shared moving personal stories of their experiences in the military and their journeys to becoming peace activists. As we build our own community, they reminded us of the importance of recognising the humanity of those who choose very different paths, whilst standing firm in what we believe to be right. In our Meeting for Worship, Quintessential have helped us to stay grounded in our spiritual practice and be thankful for our community. We have made extra space this weekend for simply being together. We have taken the opportunity to explore the city, enjoying rambling walks and rambling conversation. We have taken time to look after ourselves and each other, and our community feels richer for it.

In October, we gathered in Bristol for the largest YFGM in recent years with 86 Friends in attendance. It was good to see each other after a summer break. We reflected on what we could do ourselves and locally to support wider changes to create a fairer world which reflects our Quaker values. We welcomed a speaker from the Countering Colston Campaign to reflect on challenging the stories we tell about our community heroes, which overlook problematic areas of their life and work. We then went on to think about ways to make our Quaker communities more inclusive and open at home. Special interest groups covered how we are affected by and can challenge white supremacy; how to take forward our mental wellbeing concern; and how to envision a better charity sector. Some Friends also enjoyed a walk around Bristol. Spiritually, we reflected on Diwali, the festival of light, engaged in spiritual

dialogue and experimented with body drumming. We built our community through sharing space, eating together and a lively quiz.

YFGM provides a community for young adult friends which is in some ways more stable than the community provided by a (geographically) Local Meeting: members can continue to be part of YFGM as they move around the country, and have the opportunity to make friendships and build community with other Quakers in a similar state of life. Our meetings, our systems of outreach, and our consistent teaching of our methods and organisation, make YFGM an excellent entry point to Quakerism for young people. By enriching the spiritual practice of our members and encouraging them to live out their faith we thereby enrich the Society of Friends (Quakers in Britain) as a whole.

YFGM is able to achieve these goals; in our evaluation surveys run in 2016 and 2017:

- 99% agreed YFGM had a positive impact on their relationship to Quakerism
- 93% agreed YFGM nurtured them spiritually
- 90% agreed YFGM improved their understanding of Quakerism
- 75% agreed they need YFGM to grow as a Quaker
- 96% agreed that they would recommend YFGM to a friend

Through involvement in the meeting and its activities, and through service in volunteer roles, members develop not only their spiritual practice but also their skills, experience, and leadership in a Quaker spirit. We hope to help members to bring their faith, principles and attitude to service out into wider society, living out in their day-to-day lives the Quaker testimonies of simplicity, equality, truthfulness, and peace.

YFGM is committed to enabling as many people as possible to attend our gatherings and take part in our corporate life. Funding is provided to cover the costs of travel for newcomers and for anyone for whom attendance would otherwise be impossible, while dedicated funding is available to provide accommodation and assistance for anyone with accessibility needs. Members of the meeting, especially dedicated overseers, provide pastoral care for attenders. An outreach committee run sessions to demystify Quakers and YFGM for those who are new to the gatherings and/or to Quakerism more generally. We teach our business methods at every gathering, to ensure that all attenders are fully able to take part in our processes.

## **Structure, Governance and Management**

### *Collective Decision-Making*

As Quakers, the members of YFGM share responsibility for the wellbeing of the community. Major decisions which concern the life and projects of the meeting are undertaken in accordance with the Quaker Business Method described in Chapter 3 of our church's book of discipline, *Quaker Faith and Practice*. Young Friends assemble in silence and stillness and seek to discern what the community should do. We have specific weekends dedicated to the planning of YFGM business meetings, usually six weeks before the relevant general meeting: any member of the community may bring an item of business to a planning weekend for threshing (consideration). YFGM encourages all members to take an active part in meetings for worship for business; the procedure and its spiritual and practical background is talked through, and actively taught, at every general meeting, so that every attender may understand it and take a full part in the process.

### *Role-Holders*

Although the community makes collective decisions, to make sure that the community is organised and nurtured individual Friends take roles, including Clerks (to record and facilitate the decisions of the meeting), Overseers (to ensure the pastoral care of the community), and Quintessential (who uphold the spiritual wellbeing of the meeting), as well as many other roles. The running of YFGM depends on volunteers who are members of our community – these volunteers (including Trustees) are found using the Quaker nominations process. This process starts when the meeting identifies a task that needs to be performed. A nominations committee exists within YFGM that is made up of 9 members and which is nominated, in business sessions, by the wider meeting itself. At general meetings the committee takes anonymous suggestions from the community for new candidates to fill those roles that are releasing their current holders. The nominations committee meets to discern, in the spirit of worship, whose gifts might be suited to the roles that must be filled; and in between meetings, individual members approach those who have been suggested for roles to find out if the person understands the role, and is willing and able to assume it. 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 names, and the opportunity to express any doubts. We emphasise the importance of saying no to a nomination if the candidate feels that they are not willing and able; and we make sure that candidates know that it is possible to leave a role before the usual end of its term. The nominations process used by the Society of Friends recognises both that appointments may call for specific gifts and competences, and that roles may bring to light unsuspected abilities in those appointed to them; and we regard service through roles as a chance for both practical and spiritual development.

### *Trustees*

Trustees are appointed by YFGM to maintain a strategic vision for YFGM and ensure that YFGM comply with relevant legal obligations. Trustees can make such decisions on behalf of YFGM as are not appropriate for business sessions, or as must be made between general meetings. A list of the active trustees in the year 2017 is provided below:

**Convenor of Trustees (chair):** Kellie Turner  
**Finance Trustee:** Cáit Gould  
**Management Trustee:** Tim Rouse  
**Co-Clerk:** Peter Doubtfire (Released May 2017)  
**Co-Clerk:** Jenny McCarthy  
**Co-Clerk:** Michelle Dumont (Appointed October 2017)  
**Overseer Trustee:** Francesca Loise (Released October 2017)  
**Overseer Trustee (also Safeguarding lead):** Tom Eddington (Appointed October 2017)  
**Quintessential Trustee:** Toni Carmichael-Harris (Released February 2017)

At time of reporting the trustees are:

**Convenor of Trustees (chair):** Alexandra Boliver-Brown (Appointed October 2018)  
**Finance Trustee:** Cáit Gould  
**Management Trustee:** Tim Rouse  
**Co-Clerk:** Rici Marshall-Cross (Appointed May 2018)

**Co-Clerk:** Samuel Cooper (Appointed May 2018)  
**Overseer Trustee (also Safeguarding lead):** Tom Eddington (Appointed October 2017)  
**Quintessential Trustee:** Jane Booth (Appointed October 2018)

Trustee positions of Convenor of Trustees, Finance Trustee, Management Trustee and Co-clerk are nominated by the nominations process explained above. The position of Quintessential Trustee and Overseer Trustee are filled from the members of the quintessential committee and overseer committee respectively. At the end of 2017, the position of Quintessential Trustee remains empty. The quintessential committee felt that there was no one willing and able to fulfil the role at the time the existing trustee stepped down. The minimum number of Trustees appointed remains above the minimum listed in our constitution.

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. The finance trustee takes lead responsibility for the financial oversight of the charity; the management trustee is responsible for the operation of the YFGM office, and is the committee's point of contact with the coordinator; there are two clerks, who are responsible for the business sessions at YFGM. The quintessential trustee acts as a link between the trustees and the quintessential committee; while the overseer trustee acts as a link between the trustees and the overseers, and also acts as our safeguarding lead.

### *Internship*

An intern, known as the YFGM Coordinator, is employed through Britain Yearly Meeting to offer YFGM administrative support that includes arranging venues, providing connection to the wider British Quaker community, and acting as a single point of contact for members and prospective new attenders.

### **Safeguarding**

Safeguarding was a key concern toward the end of 2017, requiring reflection by the Trustees on our knowledge and practices in dealing with incidents and concerns involving the charity membership.

In October of 2017 the Trustees of YFGM were made aware of an allegation (by a third party) of abuse by a YFGM volunteer towards another member. Trustees took immediate and proportionate action to ensure the safety of everyone at the upcoming event. Advice was sought from professional bodies and the incident was discussed with the involved parties separately. A full report of the incident was made to the Charity Commission on 12 December 2017.

The outcomes of the October incident highlighted the need for YFGM to create a Safeguarding Policy to better protect members and to manage any incidents that may arise in future in a clear and consistent way. The Trustees undertook to begin preparing the Safeguarding Policy in late 2017 to be presented in draft form and approved by the YFGM community in February 2018.

The Trustees are satisfied that the measures taken in response to this incident, in combination with the written Safeguarding Policy which followed, adequately address

any risks connected to this allegation. Anyone with concerns about this can contact [yfgm.safeguarding@gmail.com](mailto:yfgm.safeguarding@gmail.com) for support.

## **Financial review details**

### *Fundraising*

One of our greatest achievements of the year, largely due to the work of our volunteer fundraiser, was to diversify our income streams and maintain our income levels after becoming no longer eligible for funding from our largest funder. We received a range of grants from a much wider group of funders on last year, and through greater awareness raising and exercises such as running an appeal in *The Friend* magazine, we increased the donations given by our members and attenders by £1200 and from Quaker meetings and Friends across the country by £9768 on last year.

Our largest funder this year, Britain Yearly Meeting, has provided us with an outreach grant which helped us to provide a public benefit to a greater number of people through offering free travel to all newcomers, accessibility bursaries to those who needed off-floor accommodation and travel to help participate in our events and community, as well as printing of our magazine which helps inform Quakers of all ages around the country of our activities. Through communicating more widely and being more financially supportive to those who wish to attend our gatherings we have seen a noticeable increase in our members and attenders and hope this will continue into next year.

### **Reserves policy**

It is YFGM policy that the minimum level of reserves that we aim to maintain should be approximately equal to six months to one year plus any expenditure required in order to honour existing employment contracts. We may also need to build up extra funds to enable us to offer a new contract on this basis. This is in order to enable us to survive a sudden drop in our expected income and to get new fund-raising strategies in place without immediately curtailing our activities. The level of reserves required should be considered annually during the budgeting process, and the budget should be set in accordance with this policy.