

Report from the Trans and Non-binary special interest gathering (Nov 2018), including context/motivation for the SIG and statement of inclusion

In July 2017, the government announced a public consultation on reforming the way people in the UK can change their legal gender (the Gender Recognition Act). Following this, there has been a rise in public discussion of trans issues. Current law (the Equality Act) allows for organizations and individuals to exclude trans people from single-sex spaces in certain circumstances, and any reforms will not affect this. Legal gender recognition does not affect whether or not a trans person can access single-sex spaces. Furthermore, we are aware that trans people — especially trans women — in current society are at disproportionately high risk of unemployment, discrimination, violence, mental health difficulties, and suicide. Nevertheless, this consultation has resulted in the spread of unfounded fear and misinformation about the presence of trans women in women-only spaces.

There has been dispute within the Society of Friends recently about Quaker Meeting Houses hosting events which promote these views. Many trans Friends and allies feel that this use of Meeting Houses is not in-keeping with Quaker values, or with the following guidance from Quaker Faith and Practice:

“the use of Quaker premises by political parties, and by other religious or secular organisations with whose principles or practices Friends might not be in sympathy will always require careful consideration and full consultation with Friends in the meeting most closely concerned.” 14.27

However, not all Quakers agree. It has become clear that there are different views across the Society regarding trans rights. At YFGM in May 2018, we considered what response we might have to this situation. The business meeting was deeply emotive and highlighted the need for an opportunity to respond more thoroughly, which has been the aim of a recent special interest gathering.

A group of around 20 young adult Quakers met at Chester Meeting House from November 16th – 18th. We heard from trans Quakers on their experiences and their faith, and discussed our hopes and concerns on this subject. We then worked together to consider action we might take as individuals and as an organisation to work towards trans inclusion within the Society of Friends.

Suggested practical actions at YFGM events included only using trans inclusive Meeting Houses, providing gender neutral bathrooms, and ensuring any gendered spaces are explicitly trans inclusive. We also encourage individual Friends to bring this topic back to their local meetings, for example through workshops, Meetings for Learning, and informal conversation. We closed the weekend by drafting the following value statement, which we send to YFGM for discernment in the hope that it will be adopted and sent to Meeting for Sufferings.

Value Statement:

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 — 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 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.”