

## Appendix 2 - Reflections on the Spiritual Review

- A. Elders' Update
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*Note: These items were not received by the General Meeting and are instead included as reflections on the event.*

### **A: Elders' Update**

#### **May YFiB**

From the 22nd to the 25th of May 2026, the General Meeting of Young Friends in Britain met to have a spiritual review. Within this meeting there were many meetings, different groups of people brought different hopes and expectations; and they left having had many different experiences of the weekend. As the clerks' offering notes, there is no way to summarise this weekend or tie it together. The Spiritual Review part of the weekend produced no minutes or concrete outcomes; instead much of the unaddressed pain, particularly around role-holder burnout/expectations was brought out into the light. We heard a minute written by the nominations committee in 2017(!) showing these problems are long running and structural, not simply a feature of the current people involved.

Throughout the weekend, the idea of stripping YFiB all the way back to an agenda-less event came up a few times in ministry. This wasn't minuted, and shouldn't be claimed as the sense or discerned will of the meeting, but to the elders this feels like a hopeful and open way to re-imagine YFiB. We think it's the right thing for the October gathering.

#### **Plans for October**

The current plan is that both the YFiB in October and its planning weekend will have a minimal agenda (meal times, legally required business and the rest as community time). The elders will meet over the coming months to work out exactly what this will mean, please be patient with us, and hold us in the light.

### **B: Clerks' Offering**

On Friday 22 May 2026, Friends met at Bristol Redlands Meeting House for a Spiritual Review of the General Meeting of Young Friends in Britain (YFiB).

At a typical gathering, your clerks bring an offering to closing worship to try and speak to a little of what we have witnessed. When it came to the Monday afternoon of our long weekend, it felt beyond our power to write what had happened, particularly because it was still happening. It definitely continues to be beyond our power, but we'll offer what we can.

We came with love for our Meeting, and we came with fear that it would be changed and too much would be lost. We feared that we would be lost from it. There was so much that was needed and wanted and hoped for, and these were gifts we couldn't hold. We tried and tried to pull in tightly to ourselves so we could carry on and look for a way through, but we had deep wounds in our sides, and our arms were nailed open.

The weekend started hot and it got hotter, until Monday was the hottest day ever recorded in May.

Over the weekend, we weren't all one meeting. Instead, we'd been like the acapella group in Pitch Perfect 2; some Friends were singing and some were putting out a fire. We hadn't been all one meeting outside of the weekend either. We can be a place for rest, but our gatherings are not events with event planners and event attendees. We belong to each other.

We heard that YFiB is a place to be together. It can be good when we meet and that can be reason enough for meeting. When we looked at what we want to bring to the world, we saw that we want to bring Friends. We can help each other to understand where we are led, and help us to act in the world. We are called to be patterns, be examples; this is where we can learn the shape of them. We are equipping one another for our lives as ministers to the Truth and we long to share this with the Friends who seek it.

And yet, we are fallible and we fail. We were reminded of ministry that has been alive in our Meeting for over a decade, that Nominations Committee might be a meat-grinder, feeding in Friends to be mashed up by roles.

We want to be good. We ask so much of ourselves as a Meeting, and in doing so we ask too much of each other. We wish to be accountable to Friends, and we find no space left to be accountable to God. We have so much demanded that we have nothing more to offer.

There have been so many times we've heard this and tried to change it, until a caught breath has held us back from the totality of it. This time, we were called to let the fire burn: clarifying, complete and redemptive. "Even if a tenth part remains in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump." [Isaiah 6:18]

On late Monday morning, elders and clerks were huddled. We were asking what form the next session needed to take. The Meeting hadn't even decided next steps for our October gathering in Edinburgh. We were caught so fractiously between our desire for an output, a way to justify that the Meeting was okay with the leadings it had discerned, and our desperate need for us to worship together as one body. We heard a lamentation: "Friends, we are grinding the meat *right now*."

There had been moments before this when the bounds of our weekend had broken and the Spirit couldn't be held in by our own demands, but this was the moment when we let the call for the Spirit lead; we invited it in and we were transformed.

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There was so much grace throughout the weekend. Friends carried ice and lollies and forced water and suncream on us. We were given tissues and *Advices and Queries*. The heat got the better of us and we were grateful for that, because we needed the worse in us that it revealed. We hugged Friends and didn't tell them that they smelled and we shared keys to a local Friend's shower reverently. We held worship in every room, in the garden, by the bike racks, on the street next to the bins. A fox visited us in worship and later pooped on our bench.

We're thankful for the Friends who fed us. We're thankful for the newcomers who came without knowledge but chose to uphold us anyway. We're thankful for our elders and our facilitators, and we're sorry we couldn't receive what we'd asked you to give.

How do we let the fire burn? We don't have to decide what gets lost in the flames, we can just let it be taken. We can grieve this. When we find ourselves turning inward, asking what is wanted from us, we can stop and let this impulse catch light, offering as we are led instead. We shouldn't be afraid to fail; we need to be allowed to let that happen. We will hold grace for each other and we can trust that the Spirit will remain with us. We gather because something sacred happens when we do. We gather because we love each other.

At our Planning Weekend for the Spiritual Review, we said we were called to fuck around and find out, and we did. At the end, we sang together.

## **C: Received Ministry**

Dearest Friends,

Oh! I was there when it all went wrong - I was doing the dishes. The people jangled and raged but The Lord was over them and the Lord was over all.

“Sing and rejoice; for even in this darkness of night, the Seed of God is within us. Truth doth flourish as the rose; and the plants grow atop the hills; there shall grow lilies from among the thorns, and the lambs shall spring and leap.”

A spring of fresh water breaks the rocks. Hands reach across, palms open. We are again children of love, learning anew the melodies of the divine.

It is not easy to learn; it is not easy to grow - Love's first name is patience. We wait, seemingly without end, for our lives to break before us into joyful singing. No sound emerges: we wait.

I have lived a thousand heart breaks. Never have I seen such resilience as this.

It is not that we must trust the Will of Love to deliver us.

It is that we will find a way to Love even if it seems impossible for such a thing to be right.

Perhaps our frustrations are a grief.

- Evergreen, undying.

Break the cycle. Be a fist of flowers through the thorn of wretchedness.

Love's first name is patience - Love's primary action is the open hand.

Reach for the hand and it shall find you.

This is eternal. This is forever.

It has been my ministry to uphold the griefs of this gathering with a gentle hand and a well-greased elbow.

I hope that my labours of Love could bear fruit - if not now, then at the right time.

Dear Friends, go forth well,  
Ed :)

## **D: Report 1**

Report by Joan

Last weekend, I spent the better part of four days in a very warm meeting house in Redland, Bristol, with a group of about 60 young Friends. We ate and slept together, with food provided by Quaker Vegan Witness and sleeping arrangements which

involved camping mats and the meeting house floor. Fans were placed in the main meeting room, and there were many excursions to the nearby ice cream shop.

This YFiB weekend was different to our usual events. We termed it a "spiritual review" and went in with a big agenda which tried to accommodate for all of the big discussions that we felt we needed to have: about money, our structures and committees, what it is that we actually want and feel led to achieve within this community. We invited facilitators, Anand and Adam, to help guide us in our sessions.

As the sessions went on, it became clear to us that we need something to change, potentially quite drastically. The words "burn it all down and start again" came up quite a few times - first as some crazy extreme, and slowly as a more serious idea. A lot of our role holders are very burnt out, and it is clear that the way we're currently operating is not sustainable. Many Friends expressed that our structures are not serving us, nor are they allowing us to serve the leadings of the Spirit.

Over the course of these many conversations, we gave voice to our pains and frustrations, and at the same time we hurt and frustrated each other. We were filled with a sureness that we needed to do something differently, and yet a total uncertainty of what the future might hold. By the end of the sessions on Sunday, our agenda had been rearranged, with no real ideas of what we would be doing the following morning. The plan by that point was that we would have some kind of big business or discernment session, that our clerks and elders might present us with a question or a minute or proposals for us to discern on. After several delays to the start of this final big meeting, none of those things happened. Instead, we threw the remains our agenda and business plans out of the window and we had a meeting for worship.

In that hour, we remembered that we love each other, and that we have been angry and frustrated because we love each other, because we care about doing the best we can for our community. Several Friends expressed their fears over this weekend that they had stopped hearing the Spirit, or that we had inadvertently turned it away. In our meeting we heard ministry from a Friend who said,

*Friends, do we really think that the Spirit can be killed? Do we really think that we are capable of building a wall high enough that it cannot break through? Do we not think that the anger and pain we have felt in trying to find the right way forward is the anger and pain of the Spirit itself?*

We heard ministry from a Friend reminding us of our need for safeguards, and also that we our structures are not set in stone. They reminded us that we do not have structures for the sake of tradition but because they aid us in our spiritual needs. If they are failing to do that, we need to rethink their usefulness to us.

One Friend told us that we had heard so much spoken ministry that what we needed was silence. So they stood and ministered silence. Another Friend gave really quite compelling ministry inspired by the plot of the film Pitch Perfect 2. Our

newly appointed treasurer enthusiastically told us that, contrary to the anxieties we'd been having about our finances, we should actually be coming up with more and bigger projects to spend our money on. He wants to be excited by what we come up with, to have something that really feels worth writing funding applications over. The meeting ended as always with us all holding hands, and with one of our clerks spontaneously leading us in singing one of the Taizé songs we'd sung in Saturday night's epilogue.

We did not finish our weekend with the answers to all of the practical questions that we'd possibly hoped to find, but we did end with a sense of spiritual unity and a trust that everything else can grow from that.

My own experience of the weekend ended in what should have been a 2.5-hour train journey turning into 5. All of the trains were thankfully air conditioned, and I was blessed to be accompanied by Friends for the entire journey. With the post-YFiB buzz, those five hours were easily filled with the many ideas we had from surveys about pacifism to a shawl one of us had been gifted which might turn into a Quaker embroidery project. One of the big ideas that stuck was that we would like to set up a Young Friends meeting in South Wales. We now have a WhatsApp group, and loose plans for a monthly meeting, which could alternate between Cardiff and Swansea.

*Laudate omnes gentes,*

*Laudate dominum*

*Sing praises all you peoples,*

*Sing praises to the Lord*

*- Taizé*

## **E: Report 2**

Report by Kes Ward

*Disclaimer: I offer this report as constructed by my own experiences and through conversations with others who also attended, together with my own reflective attempts to sensemake the turbulence YFiB is in right now. Like all such reports, it should be taken as definitely incomplete and possibly incorrect.*

What a weekend, ay?

I think we actually managed to answer the question “what are we?”. The answer is “a bunch of young adults tasked with running BYM’s young adult Quaker outreach and development programme, critically under-resourced in doing so”. For a few people there it was “attendees of BYM’s young adult Quaker outreach and development

programme, who like it very much and would like it to continue happening please”, but mostly it was a weekend defined by echoing voices of organisational lament.

It seems that there are some roleholders who feel like they’re being treated like staff members (that is, having all the niggliest bits of work and criticisms from the community landing upon them and only them to fix) that are “paid” only in travel costs and sorely in need of a workplace risk assessment. And there are some roleholders who probably should resign their roles and ask for YFiB’s bursary fund instead (assuming that the reason they haven’t already done so is because their financial situation is dire enough that they need their travel paid). And there are some roleholders whose committee / “corner of YFiB” seems to be functioning basically fine, who weren’t actually aware of all this until wounds were metaphorically ripped open in front of them.

Notably missing through the ideas of what we *are* was the feeling of being an independent-of-BYM Quaker political discerning and acting body. It seems that the reason we discern on matters of import to young adults is not actually to act on them and thereby be a necessary thorn in the side of older Quakers - it is to give young adults the experience of participation in gathered Quaker discernments on things they may personally care about, and in doing so teach them Quaker discipline. I have always wondered why there has been such heavy resistance within YFiB to the idea of online joiners to our business meetings: now I think I understand, that the maintenance of discipline as a teaching opportunity (far easier when not blended) is actually worth far more to the community than gathering all so-led voices into the room for the actual topic under discernment (whether they are free to cross the country that weekend or not). I tentatively offer the proposal that that Quaker political centre has shifted or is shifting to somewhere in the Society that is not us. I suspect those more in want of the second kind of community might better find it elsewhere these days, including at the young adult spaces at BYM/CYM itself, far closer to the beating political heart of British Quakerism.

I think, Friends, that we are starting to do the necessary internal work towards the task of prioritising. Part of defining who we are is defining who we are *not*, and stopping trying to be those things. This is something YFiB has shied away from recently, as we have tried to be all things to all people, and thereby burned out our capacity at certain critical points within our organisational structure.

Here’s my thoughts on the exactness of those tension points, and a series of conversation starters for “how to fix YFiB’s structures”.

- Our feedback collection and sharing mechanism needs to change to a more inherently relational mechanism that encourages useful suggestions and compliments, rather than subject our roleholders each planning weekend to somewhat narratively incoherent collections of biting anonymous criticisms. As someone who basically doesn’t care about mildly upsetting people while

getting jobs done, I wasn't aware before this weekend about just how much rejection-sensitivity YFiB's attendee base is carrying, and therefore how much pain the idea of someone thinking you're doing it wrong causes and so the way our feedback mechanisms are burning people out. (To anyone reading this who is young, I promise it gets less painful after about age 25!). Possibly we could do something about collating reports, instead of an anonymous feedback form?

- Something needs to be done about Switchboard, that it is convened in a way that better supports the mental and spiritual health of its attendees, and that efforts are taken to repair the communication gap between it (and through it, committees) and other long-time attenders at YFiB. This is probably an issue with the Switchboard convenor finding themselves critically overburdened with other things to do (not least helping fix the things that come to Switchboard), and so it's something about workload allocation / facilitation training for whoever the convenor is or becomes.
- Those in roles who aren't actually taking on the work of those roles should have a more well-worn pathway of exit from them. It's not a great and devastating failure to be taken in the moment by the idea of helping at something, but ultimately find a three year commitment to be too long in the timespan of a young adult's life. Might our Nominations check in at about the one year mark with a conversation with the roleholder as to whether their leadings are flourishing, they secretly want out but are afraid to say this in front of their social group, or what they actually need is a travel bursary?
- Those who count themselves as "attendees of BYM's young adult quaker outreach and development programme, who like it very much and would like it to continue happening please", need to make sure they pay for the value they gain somehow. If they cannot afford to pay for it themselves, then they need to ask their Area Meeting to pay and write reports each time for their Area Meeting to justify the spend, or otherwise perform some kind of fundraising activity on behalf of YFiB (why not apply for a young adult events and learning grant? Why not ask your parents, if they're Quakers?) if their connections with their Area Meeting are weak for reasons not up to them. The structures of YFiB need to change to make this part of the expected administrative workflow of attendance.
- As for those who might be inclined to financially pay above their way, of which we demonstrably have extremely few if any: Young adult Quakers seem to be quite poor at the topic of giving, which is a shame as I feel it core to my experience of lived Quaker simplicity. I would quite like to cultivate a Friend group who understands the joys of dematerialising and deconveniencing one's life in favour of supporting the causes and relationships they deeply care most about, and I would like to see more of those people (who exist within Quakers) attending YFiB. Perhaps it is simply a matter of waiting a while for our membership to age and get onto better overall financial footings.

I will finish with a brief note on the catering. Kerri and Lauren (and myself) from Quaker Vegan Witness did a fantastic job supporting the spiritual review. I personally look forward to developing more relationships with Quaker Vegan Witness (particularly the young adults therein) on matters of food and catering across the Society of Friends.

I will note that, capacity-wise, YFiB's catering fell apart in approximately the beginning of 2025 when it was noted that the formal structure simply wasn't adequate for YFiB's size. What it has been since then has been a series of informal structures and backend coalitions forming to better identify and distribute the workload, something which we will be formalising at some point soon (the document is open for commentary). In some sense, the reason catering is fine(ish) now is precisely *because* it came to crisis point some time ago, and the coalitions of the willing have gotten in touch with each other to identify and forge paths other than that of the set structure. I might hope that something similar could happen at other structural tension points within YFiB, and that we could emerge from this process stronger than we went in.