

OfS2: Relevant Minutes from GM for Scotland

November 2017 General Meeting

Minute 5 Listening to North Scotland Area Meeting

We have been glad to listen to Friends from North Scotland Area Meeting. In a worship sharing session we heard of the history, life and special experiences of those living and worshipping in NSAM. Friends are scattered yet feel supported by GM and by the staff at Friends House. We give thanks for the community of the meeting.

We receive the following minute 57/17 from NSAM held 11th November 2017.

“We should like general meeting for Scotland and Meeting for Sufferings to consider the possibility of having a Trust body for the whole of Scotland. This would release many Friends who are currently trustees, for other service. We are reminded that AM trustees do have a role in upholding the life of the meeting. Let’s hang on to what we can do and hold our vision.”

We ask our GM trustees together with NSAM trustees to meet together to see how best to move forward with this consideration. We ask that they report back to GM when they are ready.

June 2018

Minute 9 NSAM concern on Trusteeship

We welcome the minute and the following summary of the telephone conference held 18th April 2018 between GM Trustees and NSAM Trustees. We recognise that this area of concern is one that we want to fully understand and come to unity on.

There is a need for those concerned to move forward, to continue to explore and look at all possibilities with as positive a light as possible. We celebrate the work of The Listening Project and want to acknowledge the passion, work and listening that went into this. We also feel the distress at the sense that the amount of work completed has been forgotten or may be repeated. We hope NSAM’s role holders can be better supported. We realise that we need to seek and give support. This can be sought and found among Friends in LM, AM and hopefully from God.

We warm to the idea of setting up a meeting with Paul Parker our Recording Clerk to include Scottish AM trustees, GM Trustees, Clerks to AM and GM Nominations Committees and those in GM who feel invested in this concern. We ask all those who would like to be invited to this meeting to contact adwoabittle@hotmail.co.uk

We ask our clerk to convene and clerk this meeting and report back to GM as soon as is practicable. We ask that this meeting happens as soon as is possible. We need to find a way that allows us to feel connected, spiritually enriched and part of a growing community.

We hope Friends present will hold NSAM in the light and share this concern so that there is a feeling of openness, love and sensitivity around Scotland as we work through this together.

September 2018

Minute 5 Minute from meeting held 13th Sept on NSAM concerns

In minute 9 Of General Meeting held 16th June 2018, the clerk was asked to convene and clerk a meeting with Paul Parker our Recording Clerk to include Scottish AM trustees, GM Trustees, Clerks to AM and GM Nominations Committees and those in GM who feel invested in this concern. All those who would like to be invited to this meeting were invited to contact adwoabittle@hotmail.co.uk

That meeting took place on Thursday 13th September in Perth. There were 37 Friends present. The list of names is attached to these minutes so that you can find a Quaker near you with whom to talk to about the meeting, if you wish. Our clerk has read the minute from that meeting. We are grateful for all the energy that is going into this work. We are happy to endorse the suggestion that GM on 9th March 2019, to be held in Glasgow, will be dedicated to the next steps of discernment on this matter. We are glad that Paul Parker and Jonathan Carmichael will be able to attend to continue to share in and help lead this discernment with GMS. We ask that the minute from that meeting be sent to Paul and Jonathan and attached to these Minutes.

Minute from meeting held 13th September on NSAM concerns

Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another?

A desire to listen, pray and discern brought 37 Friends from across Scotland to Perth on 13th September 2018. This meeting was called following minute 9 of GM June 2018. We met to move forward on the issues and thinking that began in NSAM 3 years ago.

We welcomed Paul Parker, our Recording Clerk and Jonathan Carmichael, the BYM staff member tasked with leading the Simpler Meetings Project. Initially we were invited by our clerk to write down what brought us here and/or what we really wanted to get from the day.

There were three common themes that emerged. Firstly, to let the Spirit move amongst us. Secondly, for NSAM to be heard and for their concerns to be addressed and thirdly for us to look at the structures that are currently in Scotland as to whether they need changed or spring cleaned.

Paul Parker then led us through a very helpful framework that focussed our thoughts and contributions for the rest of the time. (see paper 1 in full report) Before lunch we considered what Pressures for Change exist. He talked about how change can be a thing that can create uncertainty hope, and conflict but can also contain joy and positivity. We shared our thoughts on this is a very worshipful session. Within the room our different voices pointed to some unity and echoed situations found throughout BYM.

After lunch we looked at the bare essentials of what is the Heart of Quakerism in Scotland. We spent time considering what it is we need to look after. (see paper 2 in full report) what gifts we have to do this service with (see paper 3 in full report) and then what structures we have at present. (see paper 4 in full report)

Then we came to the time that we needed to stop. There is not unity of understanding or unity of vision, yet. However we did really listen to each other and to God.

We said at the beginning that if we needed another meeting we would have one. We know we need another meeting. We are clear that we want this meeting to be similar to this one in that anyone across Scotland that is interested should come. We would like to invite Paul Parker and Jonathan Carmichael to the meeting. This meeting needs to be in a bigger venue and have really clear documents in advance. (so that those who have not previously been part of this discernment can catch up)

March 2019 Minutes 12 and 15

Part One of “Scottish Quakers: How do we liberate ourselves to focus on spiritual growth, community building and witness in the world?”

Paul Parker began his presentation with reading from Advices and Queries no.27 – Live Adventurously. He asked us to consider whether we could see this advice not just for us as individuals but for us as a collective. Can we see it as a challenge? Can we go carefully but boldly?

Paul reminded us of the discussions and discernments we had had in Perth on 13th September last year. (See documents in advance of today's GM). We had worked out what was important to us and what makes us who we are. In Scotland we have such a strong community with so much to draw on. So much passion.

Paul led us to acknowledge how things are changing both in the wider world and in our own lives. He reminded us of what we had said were the true essentials that we felt we needed to look after. In September we had begun to consider what needs to be done differently and what needs to stay the same. Are the structures that we have working for us doing so in ways that are joyous and adventurous?

Paul spoke of the idea of coppicing. We were led to consider “What is the heartwood of Quakerism? “When we trim back, what new shoots are ready to grow? “If I go to walk into the forest, I'd rather it was one where the Light would get in” (Paul).

During some reflection time we heard from Friends about the joy of service and the importance of learning about each other in the things that are eternal. We heard that meeting together in places that are counter intuitive at the time of the move ends up being just the coppicing that was needed to enable new shoots to flourish.

We are encouraged to open our eyes to different and new opportunities. Young Adult Friends are thriving, and we can learn from them. We hope we can include Woodbrooke in this adventure of learning.

There is more freedom than some of us think to do some things differently. We shouldn't constrain ourselves by looking too hard for permission.

Can we boldly (yet cautiously) take a Holy opportunity and be purposely expectant? Are we ready to jump off a cliff and wait for the wind to be beneath our wings?

Part Two of “Scottish Quakers: How do we liberate ourselves to focus on spiritual growth, community building and witness in the world?”

We are thankful that we have embarked on this exercise over the last few years. We are thankful for today and all that we have experienced. We are clear that we have energy, community, passion and a willingness to Live Adventurously.

We have met in small groups to consider the Menu for Change paper. This document is attached to these minutes.

On feeding back, we realise that a minute at this point cannot gather the detail, so we ask our clerks to work on a summary paper of the findings. This will be circulated as soon as it is ready. We ask that this be shared with local meetings. We are particularly keen to enable better communication between AMs.

We do have a newly constructed Communications Group who are tasked with looking at communication across Scotland. We look forward to hearing from them when they are ready.

We have returned often to the idea of inviting Woodbrooke to work in Scotland with us on spiritual and role holder courses. Indeed, all types of learning and development would be most welcome.

We were moved by the feeling in one group that, although we have been tasked by previous GM minutes to tackle our feelings of overburdened-ness, we need to be careful that we are always approaching these considerations being led by the Spirit. We feel strongly that we don't want to lose sight of this process and discernment. We ask our GM Committee to ensure it comes back to a future GM agenda.

March 2021

Minute 19 North Scotland Area Meeting minute and AM responses

The following minutes apply: 5, Nov. 17; 9, June 18; 5, Sept. 18; 12 and 15, March, 19; 12 June, 19; 7 and 8 Nov., 19; 20/03/12, 20/10/07.

Piers Voysey, clerk of NSAM, has introduced their minute 53/20. It originates from: a very real concern in North Scotland about finding Friends to serve as Trustees; their efforts towards creating simpler Meetings; and ensuring their limited time and energy are focused on spiritual nourishment of Friends and the Meeting as a whole, rather than administrative burdens.

At their meeting on 19th October, 2020, Friends in NSAM united in accepting two proposals made at a Meeting for Clearness, set up at the request of Robert Wilson. These are

- NSAM welcomes the co-operation of the four Area Meetings and General Meeting for Scotland to date, and they hope it will increase in the future, resulting in further efficiencies.
- They suggest that a single legal body for Quakers in Scotland, amalgamating the current four Area Meeting charities and that of General Meeting for Scotland, might be an option to be considered, with the proviso that any new structure must recognise local and regional expertise regarding organising social and spiritual events.

In raising this concern at General Meeting, North Scotland Area Meeting wishes to encourage GM to be prepared for change, should the time come when one or more area meetings cannot meet their legal requirements with regard to trusteeship, including financial accountability.

After receipt of NSAM minute 53/20, and further to minute 20/10/07, our General Meeting clerk invited East, West, and South East Scotland Area Meetings to consider North Scotland Area Meeting's proposals. Their responses were circulated in advance of this meeting, as part of Paper G. To inform our discernment on this matter, Paper G also includes: a summary of the work already done by GM on NSAM's concern about the lack of active membership and its effect on finding Friends to serve in essential roles, like trustees; the minutes of Inverness LM referred to in NSAM minute 53/20; and briefing papers produced by ESAM and WSAM.

We thank the area meetings for their consideration of NSAM minute 53/20. Our clerk has summarised their responses to the two proposals.

Each area meeting has embraced the suggestion for greater co-operation, closer working and mutual support between the Scottish Area Meetings and General Meeting. They felt that the sharing of experience and expertise will simplify and reduce the workload.

At this time area meetings are not in unity over the proposal for a single legal body for Quakers in Scotland. Each area meeting consulted expressed reservations about the

proposal. There was an understanding that a move in that direction would have a profound effect on area meetings and would need detailed and complex oversight by AM and GM trustees. At the same time there was a willingness to remain open to new ways of working.

Two area meetings suggested that the way forward was for GM to set up a working group. The remit of the group might be to reflect further and more deeply on a range of solutions and models, which would assist us in developing Quakers in Scotland.

GM Trustees “feel that the fundamental issue is building a flourishing Quaker community in Scotland and that a process of discernment is needed before moving to any particular change in organisational arrangements.”

We agree to take what steps we can within our current structures, to improve the functioning of our Scottish Quaker community.

We encourage GM in partnership with AMs to arrange more opportunities for role holders to meet and support one another and to explore other ways of working together.

We ask GM to set up a working group, with the following remit:

1. To reflect further and more deeply on a range of solutions and models which would assist us in developing Quakers in Scotland
2. To identify options for GM and AMs to consider, including organisational changes we can make within our current structures which would benefit us all. Work already done will be considered along with new thinking. We hope the group will be creative in generating and exploring further options.
3. To set out the pros and cons of each option
4. To write a paper on their findings for the consideration of GM and AMs

The working group should include members of each of the four Area Meetings and GM, not necessarily existing role holders. The number of Friends serving on the group should be no less than 8 and no more than 10.

We are aware that the details of this working group might benefit from further scrutiny and send this outline remit and setup to AM clerks for comment, before asking GM nominations committee to bring forward names of Friends to serve on the group.

March 2022

Minute 11 Report from General Meeting Working Group to identify options for change in the way we work which would benefit Quakers in Scotland

Further to minutes 21/03/19 and 21/09/11 the report of the “Options for Quakers in Scotland” Working Group was circulated to Friends in Scotland with the papers for this meeting. Lesley Richards, convenor of the working group, has presented the report to us today and answered our questions.

We receive this report and will consider the suggested steps we can take now and what we might do in the future to address the main issues for Quakers in Scotland, and to strengthen our Quaker Community in keeping with the vision expressed in BYM’s ‘Our Faith in the Future’. We are grateful to the group for listing what they see are the current opportunities, for each opportunity giving their analysis of the benefits and difficulties of implementing it, and for a similar analysis of possible changes we might contemplate in the future.

In small, facilitated groups we have considered the following: For some time now we have been seeking to strengthen our Quaker community in Scotland. Some Friends have expressed the need for radical change, and others the need to maintain our traditional ways of doing things, as far as possible. Today we have heard suggestions of how we might do things differently. What are your thoughts about the need for change? Has the way you feel about it altered?

Following our small group discussions, together we have responded to the report and the working group's recommendations. We welcome this report and recognise that it is a working document, which is part of a continuing process. At this point, it is timely to look at the opportunities which are available now to help us work together more effectively. The report identifies seven:

1. Establish and support role holder networks across Scotland (building on current practice).
2. Encourage and support the formation of networks of Friends with particular interests which might also be a resource for the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group.
3. Encourage GM to appoint time-limited working groups, pulling together Friends from across area meetings to consider issues of common concern.
4. GM might reflect on whether there are other ways in which it can fulfill its role as described in Quaker faith & practice 5.03a.
5. GM and AMs might hold residential events for Friends across Scotland.
6. AMs might consider if there is any advantage to changing boundaries allowing local meetings to move from one area meeting to another.
7. General Meeting, area meetings, and role holder networks might actively consider whether there are any aspects of their duties, which would benefit from a collaborative approach. This could be Scotland wide or between two or more area meetings.

We agree that General Meeting for Scotland should work with the four area meetings to consider which of these seem most appropriate and helpful, and to work out a plan for implementing them together.

We are open to more radical change in our structures, if its purpose and the way it will bring about improvement are clear. We recognise that the pandemic has pushed change upon us and we have adapted to it. We are not alone in contemplating simplifying our structures: within BYM much work is being done on this, and other churches are also engaged in simplifying their structures. It is wise to learn from others and to share our skills. We have been reminded that fundamentally we come together to listen to the leadings of the spirit and to act on them.

Our structures should support this, and release us to focus on spiritual growth, community building and witness in the world. We agree to do more exploratory work on possible future structural changes to simplify the way Quakers in Scotland function, starting with the three suggestions listed in the report.

To take things forward, we agree to set up a Working Group to serve for one year, with the following remit:

- Explore and analyse changes to our Quaker structures, which might be of future benefit to Friends in Scotland.
- Keep a watching brief on changes being adopted by Quakers elsewhere to learn from the experience of others.
- Monitor how we are putting into practice the suggestions for strengthening our Quaker community in Scotland.

We ask our GM nominations committee to bring forward the names of 6 Friends to serve on this group, plus a convenor. It would be helpful if there were some overlap with the membership of the 'Options for Quakers in Scotland' Working Group.

We thank the 'Options for Quakers in Scotland' Working Group for its report and Lesley for presenting it.

Since this group has completed its service, we lay it down and thank the members and the convenor for the considerable work they have done in generating options for us to consider.

September 2022

Minute 16 Options for Quakers in Scotland – update

We have welcomed Lesley Richards, Convenor of the Options 2 Working Group to our meeting today. Lesley has given us a brief update on the progress of the Group's work.

The working group is due to report back to GM in June 2023 and we have been asked us to consider whether we would like their report to include a proposal for changes we might make to benefit Quakers in Scotland. Their current remit is to:

- Explore and analyse changes to our Quaker structures, which might be of future benefit to Friends in Scotland.
- Keep a watching brief on changes being adopted by Quakers elsewhere to learn from the experience of others.
- Monitor how we are putting into practice the suggestions for strengthening our Quaker community in Scotland.

We are content for the Options 2 Working Group to bring us their recommendations, as part of their report next year.

We note that the report will go to the four area meetings, before it comes to General Meeting in June, so that any decision made lies with the whole Quaker community in Scotland.

We thank Lesley for her update.