



A Spiritual Review 2023

The voices of Portobello and Musselburgh Quaker Meeting



With thanks to all who contributed to this review in every way: completing the questionnaire, organising and being part of Conversation with Friends, the Reflective Sessions, the Young People's Group and the Creative Fun session. We are grateful to the Spiritual Review Group who co-ordinated this review, enabling as many Friends as possible to have their voices heard.

The Spiritual Review Co-ordinating Group:

Fabien Camus, Josie Fawcett, Cathy Holman, Robin Liebmann, Lynn Mayer, Wade Robertson, Heather Stacey and Iola Wallace

With thanks also to Hazel Darwin Clements and Tessa Thomas-Payne for their help and support with the Conversations with Friends and Creative Fun sessions.

Introduction: the idea of a Spiritual Review

“Whether elders and overseers are appointed or not, local meetings should regularly review their spiritual life and its expression in caring. A meeting might like to compile and use a series of queries for this purpose. Such a review could take place every two or three years and might in itself be a form of pastoral care. The process might start in small groups, in which unmet needs could be revealed and confidentiality respected, then move on to an occasion drawing all together. Special attention might need to be given to involving those associated with the meeting who take little part in its regular life because of youth, age, disability or disaffection.”

Quaker Faith & Practice 12.16

Following a Pastoral Friends, Elders and Convenors (PEC) meeting in March 2023, the three Elders from our Meeting were tasked to look at the idea of a Spiritual Review.

Elders reflected on their individual perspectives of the spiritual life of our Local Meeting and why now might be a good time for our meeting to review its spiritual life. We have all been through a pandemic and the Meeting has grown in number and is now a medium sized Meeting. We do not have Meeting for Worship (MfW) every week but two mornings a month and one evening, with Children’s Meetings running at the same time in the morning, plus a Young People’s Meeting once a month. We have a good working PEC group and energetic Members and Attenders.

Elders felt it was important that this is our Meeting’s Spiritual Review and not something which PEC undertakes and reports to Area Meeting: Elders would like all to feel involved and able to participate. Elders hoped all Friends will take the matters of community, worship and faith to heart and do what they can as together we can achieve much.

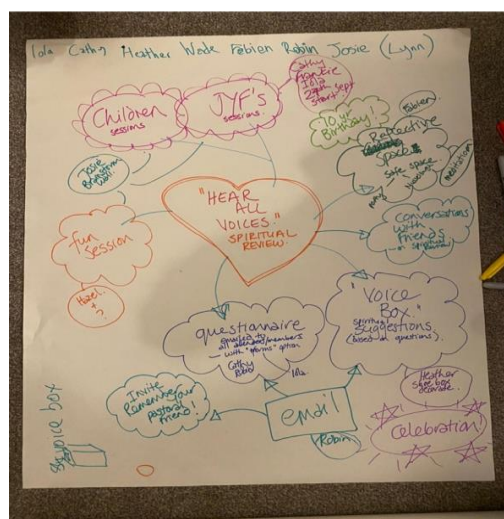
An invitation was sent out asking for Friends to consider becoming part of the Spiritual Review Coordinating Group and in August the eight members of that group met to create the process for the review.

The group wanted to create safe spaces for listening to one another, as we all have different needs to enable spiritual growth. They wanted to be inclusive and hear all voices from the meeting equally, including those who do not attend.

The aim was to undertake the review on different levels, listening to how the Spirit was working among us:

- A questionnaire would be developed
- A Conversation with Friends session around these questions would be held
- The Young People’s Group would explore the questions together
- Two quiet, reflective sessions would be organised
- A fun and games session held

Lots of information on the spiritual life of our Meeting was gathered over a period of three months. The summary which follows is part of the ongoing process of our evolving spiritual life



as Portobello and Musselburgh Quaker Meeting. From this summary, actions will be taken, more listening done with further reflection and review.

The process has been an interesting, enlivening, joyful and challenging process for us as individuals and as a Meeting for Worship.

What follows cannot have every word written in each questionnaire, nor everything said during our conversations, worship and games. We hope to reflect the themes which emerged, celebrate the joys and richness of our meeting and look at how we can do better as a community and how each of us can be involved in the life of our Quaker Meeting.

It is hoped that you can hear the spirit in this written word for as the early Quakers remind us:

*“things... may be fulfilled in the Spirit not
from the letter for the letter killeth,
but the spirit giveth life”.*

Advices and Queries 1.01

The Process: what we did

The same four questions explored throughout the Spiritual Review were used:

- **What do I value in our Meeting?**
- **What is my experience of meeting for Worship?**
- **What is missing in our Meeting?**
- **What can I contribute to the life of our Meeting?**



The Sessions: how we did it

1. The Questionnaire was created and could be completed online (Microsoft forms) or using a physical copy. This was done anonymously unless the person chose to identify themselves.

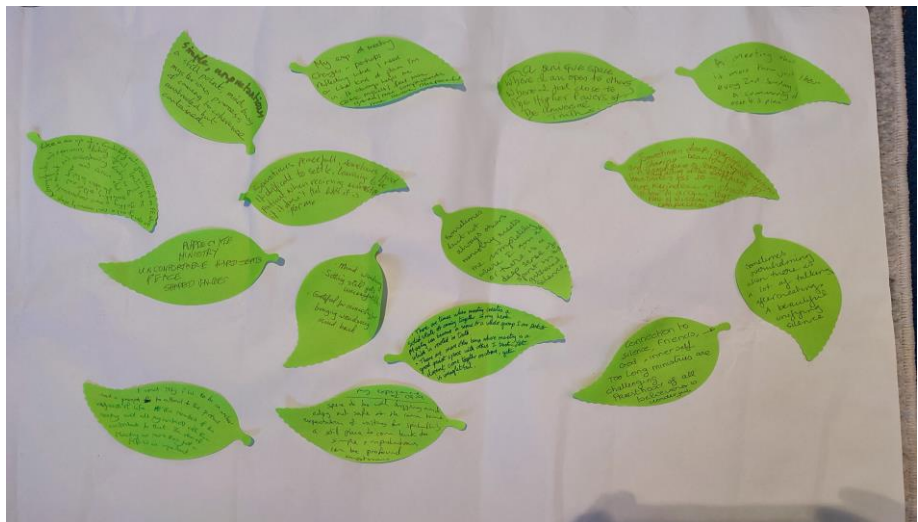
Thirteen forms were submitted – seven online and six hard copies posted into our 'Voice Box' which we had available at Meeting throughout October, November and early December.

2. The Young People's Group had a session of lively discussion and reflection. They considered the four questions and came up with some actions which they were able to implement quite quickly, with others requiring more reflection.

3. Conversation with Friends Session

Thirteen people attended the Spiritual Review Conversation with Friends on 22 October.

Following a brief silence before and after each question (including an opening question to consider the notion of spirituality), Friends paired up variously to share their thoughts, which were recorded on post-its and submitted anonymously.



Fifty-three post-it notes were added to the flipcharts and were later transposed into a document.

4. Two reflective, quieter two-hour sessions were organised: one in Portobello and one in Musselburgh.

Three Friends attended in **Portobello** and considered the first three questions; question four was not covered due to time. This reflective meditative process of quiet discernment was much appreciated adding to our spiritual growth.

Ten Friends participated in this session at the **Fisherrow Centre, Musselburgh**, one of our Meeting's previous homes.

The group was led in meditation and silence with candles representing our wider Quaker Community as the first three questions were considered. The participants chose images to help describe their experience of Meeting for Worship.

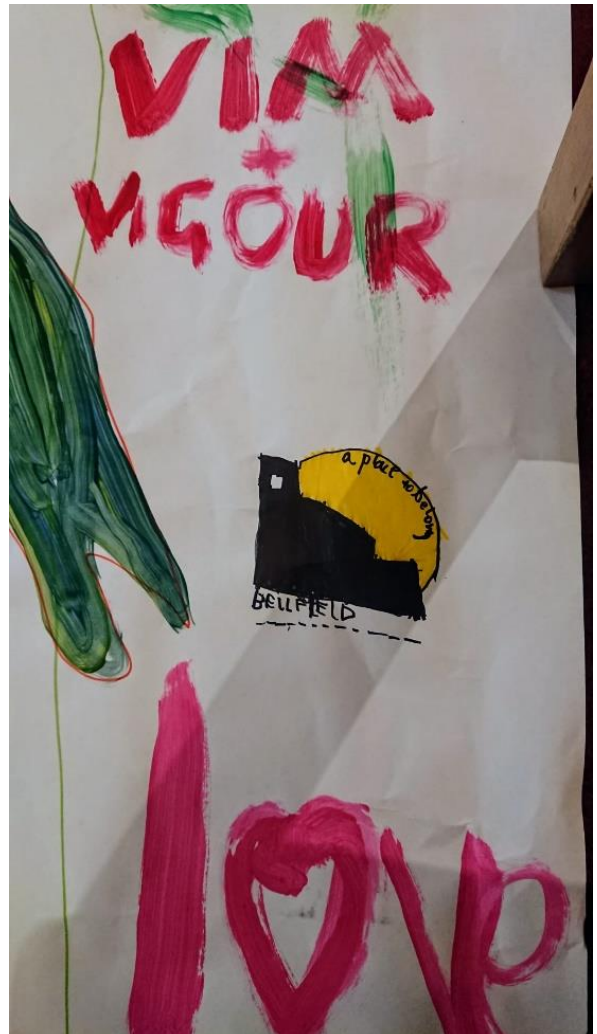
A Friend read from Quaker Faith and Practice, 10.2

“We know the power of God’s Spirit at work in the lives of people within the community of our meetings. These people may have been drawn into the community by a sudden conviction, a long period of seeking, or have grown up within it from childhood. We also know that we are engaged in a life-long growth into faith, and experience a continuing irruption of grace into our lives which demands and sustains a commitment to a life of discipleship. We recognise this power at work in people of all ages, races and creeds: a transforming power which can issue in lives of joy, humility and service.”

5. An all-age Creative Fun Session was held using dance, art and drama and involved over 20 people. We danced our ‘Quaker dance’, we laughed and sang, and with the light shining we drew around the shadows of our bodies, in response to the review questions, creating a marvellous mural.

A timeline of the meeting's journey so far was created and we all then took a step back from the mural and learned more about the experiences of the group in that time, to view our artwork afresh. We particularly reflected on the role of the places it has been held, and the role of Bellfield in shaping our meeting.

This was a joyful, moving and profound fun session and we are grateful to have the beautiful images from it to include in this document.



6. Follow-up conversations

Another source of information came from correspondence and follow-up conversations with Elders and Pastoral Friends.



The Voices: themes and reflections

The message that came through most powerfully was that people see our Meeting as a precious and important place in their lives where they can come together in silence and stillness, feeling a sense of connection, shared spirituality, common purpose, friendship, belonging and community. There is a strong sense that the regularity of Meeting for Worship (MfW) provides an immensely valued fixed point in busy lives and the turbulent world around us, an opportunity to stop, be still and engage in more profound reflection.

Many responses reflected a feeling of being engaged during Meeting for Worship in a collective endeavour to explore spiritual questions and think deeply about how we live our lives. Friends celebrate the mystery and energy of Meeting for Worship and the way it can feel like a place of safety while at the same time challenging us.

Ministry is seen as a valuable part of this. The priesthood of all believers was mentioned several times. Friends enjoy the surprise of a sudden insight from an unexpected source and the way different people may provide different perspectives on a particular theme. We respect each other as searchers for truth, welcoming both ministry that speaks to us and ministry that doesn't.

There was also widespread and honest acknowledgement that we are human and from time to time we can be distracted by noise, uncomfortable chairs and our own sometimes mundane thoughts, so that it can at times be challenging to reach a sense of the spiritual.

Diversity and inclusion

Many people valued the diversity of our Meeting and especially the range of ages. Families feel accepted, loved and cared for and there is a very clear sense that we are blessed to have so many children and young people. The variety of activities offered for children and young people is appreciated.

At the same time, other Friends questioned the lack of diversity in our Meeting in terms of the absence of people from a range of ethnic backgrounds or different social groups and classes. There was also a clear perception that Friends can feel excluded due to disability and other support needs. It is very dispiriting to have to keep asking for help and to feel unheard.

A lack of inclusiveness was expressed that can lead to a feeling of alienation. Some people felt that there was a lack of deeper friendship and that if they left their absence would not be noticed. The importance of engaging with visitors and befriending newcomers was highlighted.

Some concern was expressed about a perceived inability to deal with difficulty and conflict in our Meeting. At the same time it was pointed out that we are a relatively young Meeting and it can take time to develop the confidence as a Meeting to deal with difficult issues.

Practicalities and structure of Meeting for Worship

There was much discussion of the tasks that need to be done for our Meeting to function. Some people find it stressful and feel too much falls on too few shoulders. Some would like to help but lack the confidence or feel intimidated by the feeling that others are more experienced or that there is insufficient guidance. There was an acknowledgement that, as our Meeting grows, so do the responsibilities both logistically and pastorally.

In terms of things people feel are missing, there were numerous comments about the structure of Meeting for Worship and how it works. These included not being sure how to know when MfW starts and ends, not being sure who the elders and pastoral friends are and what their roles are and thinking about the possibility of having more structure in MfW, with ideas such as regular readings from Advices and Queries to bring the Meeting together. There were also queries about ministry and how to develop confidence in giving ministry.

This discussion of MfW leads into wider questions about the structure of our Meeting, in particular a clear desire to explore options for Meetings for Worship on a weekly basis, at different times of day and for a regular Meeting for Worship in Musselburgh to ensure that we embrace and uphold the fact that we are Portobello *and* Musselburgh Meeting.

While the opportunity to chat and eat together was voiced by many as a valued part of our Meeting, several people wondered about ways to ensure a smoother transition from silence and reflection to noise and chatter. The wish was expressed by several Friends for a space after Meeting for Worship where deeper, spiritual conversations could be held.

Spiritual growth and learning

Indeed, the Spiritual Review has revealed a real thirst to learn more about Quakerism outside Meeting for Worship and for opportunities for discussion and exploration of the spiritual life, as well as the chance to engage in radical action together. The existing offerings of evening and daytime meetings to explore subjects more deeply is appreciated and interest in more shared spiritual and creative activities was clearly expressed. The Spiritual Review was welcomed as an opportunity to explore spiritual aspects outside the Meeting for Worship space, as it can sometimes feel as though the focus outside MfW is more on business and practical matters.

In addition to the desire for more opportunities for spiritual exchange and growth, many people expressed a readiness to be involved in contributing to the Meeting in many different ways, from helping with rota tasks, to helping to organise events, offering to run creative activities or lead worship at other times.

Young people's views

It seems worthwhile to focus separately on some of the points raised by the discussion held by the young people at their Meeting for Worship – not to set them aside from the wider Meeting, but because they had some interesting perspectives that didn't come out in the other sessions and the questionnaires.

As in the Meeting more generally, they expressed similar appreciation for the opportunity to come together with space for reflection and for the balance between serious topics and fun.

Of particular note is the fact that they are very conscious of the dynamic of their Meeting, where the participants constantly get older and their needs and participation are continually changing. They are very clear-sighted about the need for succession planning, as older members of the group will be moving on and there will be younger people moving up from Children's Meeting.

They recognise the importance of Area Meeting, although they find the amount of time spent on the business side less interesting. However, they enjoy visiting other Local Meetings and receiving visitors at our Meeting and are keen to promote our young people's meeting more widely within

Area Meeting. It's notable that there was far more mention of Area Meeting and interaction with people in other Local Meetings from the young people than from the adults.

The young people also expressed the wish to move their Meeting for Worship so that it coincides with Meeting for Eating, providing more opportunity for socialising after MfW and this has already been implemented. They also raised the issue of communication and have now set up a Whatsapp group to address this.

Creative session

It's also worth separately mentioning the creative fun session, where many of the thoughts and ideas written down elsewhere during the Spiritual Review process were expressed physically through dance, movement and art. A timeline of Portobello and Musselburgh Meeting was illustrated by members with longer memories and was appreciated by some people who have arrived more recently. The event could perhaps be summed up in this quote:

“A desire to be more welcoming to a more diverse group of people was expressed, to have more sparkle, colour and music, to hold space for grief and challenge, and to be quietly radical.”

The Voices: in Friends' own words

This is a selection of quotes given by Friends in the different sessions. It is not intended to be comprehensive but just to provide a flavour of the richness of the responses to the Spiritual Review.

"Holding a moment"

"A grounding anchor"

"A sense of common purpose"

"I live better coming to Meeting for Worship and feeling the energy of people"

"I could leave tomorrow and not be particularly missed"

"Who closes the Meeting?"

"Range of ages"

"Support"

"Simple, unpretentious, a still point"

"Uncomfortable chairs"

"LISTEN WITH LOVE"

"More biscuits especially chocolate ones"

"Daring"

"Holding a moment"

"Time to stop and listen"

"Lack of intimate friendship"

"The love and care within which our children are held" "Stillness, openness to receiving"

"Edgy and safe at the same time"

"Balance of fun and serious sessions"

"Missing groups of people – people of colour, tradespeople, people from deprived areas"

"Commitment to activism"

"Delight"

"Aspiration to a contemplative life"

"As we grow there's more work"

"Alienation, lack of inclusiveness, exclusion"

"I value the mutual respect"

"More opportunities for spiritual conversations" "Value acceptance of children's quirks"

"Friendship"

Conclusions: a new beginning not an end

The Portobello Musselburgh Spiritual review has been an enriching experience, reviewing the spirit among us and the care for Friends. We hope Friends feel included and feel their voice has been heard. We are presented with challenges, which we hope we can rise to as we continue seeking together.

“Our life is love and peace and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another and not laying accusations one against another, but praying for another, and helping one another up with a helping hand”

Isaac Pennington 1667, Quaker Faith and Practice 10:01



The final question asked by the Spiritual Review was **“What can I contribute to the life of our Meeting?”** In response Friends expressed the will and desire to be involved in the further development of the life of our Meeting. We therefore commend the following **topics for reflection and action** by Portobello and Musselburgh Quaker Meeting.

We recognise that it may often be more appropriate for Meeting for Business to agree which groups of Friends are best placed to take forward an action rather than necessarily discerning the precise steps required. We are reminded that we do not wish this to become a ‘to do list’ of tasks but a way to deepen our spiritual lives and the seeking of the divine in our worship together.

Exploring spirituality beyond Sunday meetings

Issue	Who can take this forward?
How can we create opportunities to discuss and share our experience of the light outside Sunday morning meeting?	
How do we deepen friendships outside the Meeting?	
How do we develop opportunities to engage in radical action together?	

The range of meetings we hold

Issue	Who can take this forward?
Could we run a 3rd Sunday MfW / Musselburgh Meeting for Worship?	

Considering the running of our Meeting

Issue	Who can take this forward?
Improving the accessibility of the meeting, so all can attend and participate	
How can Friends develop confidence in giving ministry?	
Who closes meeting?	
Improving transition from worship to refreshments and considering space after Meeting for Worship where deeper, spiritual conversations can be held	
Should we have readings of Advices and Queries during Meeting for Worship?	
How could the roles and membership of the PECS team be more visible?	
Succession of young people into and from the Young People's Group	
How could more people feel empowered to be involved in rota tasks so these jobs don't always fall on the same shoulders?	

Welcoming everyone to our meeting

Issue	Who can take this forward?
How do we make sure everyone, especially new people, feels welcome at our meeting?	
How can we increase the diversity of those who attend meeting?	

