



GENERAL MEETING FOR SCOTLAND

10 September 2016
Aberdeen

Min. 1 Worship

During our opening period of worship we heard read part of paragraph 3.02 of Quaker Faith and Practice relating to the nature of our meetings for worship for business.

Min. 2 Welcome

We welcome 3 attenders to this GM.

We will record the total numbers of all present and add them to these minutes.

East Scotland	5
South East Scotland	5
North Scotland	11
West Scotland	5
Total:	26

Min. 3 Reporter

We appoint Robin Davis from West Scotland AM to report this meeting to *The Friend* and the *Scottish Friend*. We ask North Scotland AM to report on the next GM.

Min. 4 A Challenge to our Quaker Structures: Managing decline or using what we have been given?

Michael Hutchinson challenged us to think about the state of Quakers in Britain – what annoys us about Quakers? What makes us angry or worried?

There is lack of understanding and lack of knowledge of what it is to be a Friend. There is a lack of understanding of our business method and its significance. How can we be Quakers without experiencing the fundamentals? Will we wither away?

Michael showed us his passion for the reality of how few Friends really “get” the Gathered Meeting. If we are all spectators, it cannot work. i.e. if we are "a bottom up organisation without a strong bottom". Michael wonders if we should be thinking ahead to creating structures that rely on fewer people. He questioned, tongue in cheek, whether we might wish to abolish all Area Meetings.

Quakers are well suited to change. Change in any operation is necessary to keep it going. These changes need to reflect what is happening around us. Are Quaker business meetings representative of the people we are writing minutes for?

Being a member of the Religious Society of Friends involves commitment and identity. We are a people that walk together as a group greater than ourselves. Are we committed to a vision of what we could and should be? Now is a time that it would be good to adapt. We are not top heavy and we can make changes. Those running the show are busy doing so but what is the context that we are in? What is the engagement?

Michael reflects that this might not be about finding a structural change to fix everything. It is about discernment, looking at where we are and what we can do to share our valuable insights.

*“Membership is, or ought to be, about **transformation**. The transformation of individuals who have experienced the divine spirit at work in their lives. The transformation of the community which has sensed, and tries to live out its particular role in bringing about transformation of the world which can be seen as God’s purpose”*
Helen Rowlands

Are we more concerned about including everyone than ensuring we have a gathered transforming worship? How do we help this? It is not about rules. It is about listening and waiting together. We have to make the community active together. We need to start with the power of the community and move forward together transformed.

Michael hopes we can get back and *“always be a people who seek after those things that make for peace, love and unity.”*
Margaret Fell

This conversation is of particular interest to GM clerks and Function Groups as we move forward in discernment about GM’s role. It is clear that those in service need to be aware that we are servants of the meeting. The engagement of all is so important.

How do we harness the power of our group?

Min. 5 Nominations matters

Nominations Function Group have brought forward the following names and we agree to appoint them:

PLFG Convenor Joyce Taylor	January 2017 to December 2019
Clerk of Trustees Martin Burnell	January 2017 to December 2019
GM Trustee Catherine Brown (1 st triennium)	with immediate effect until December 2018
Scottish Churches Housing Action Bill Edgar	January 2017 to December 2019
Scottish Interfaith Council Barbara Potter (2 nd triennium)	January 2017 to December 2019
Auditor Paul Kenny (3 rd year)	January 2017 to December 2017

Min. 6 New members and deaths

We record the following new members since our last meeting:

Aileen Maxwell (W)
Huw Lloyd-Richards (E)
Chris Holmes (E)

We record the following deaths:

Charlotte Green (SE)
Jenny Faulkner (W)
Joy Townell (E)

Min. 7 Review of General Meeting

The Clerk has introduced his analysis of the questionnaire inviting the views of Friends and Attenders throughout Scotland on the conduct of General Meeting. It was completed by 11.6% of all adult members and attenders and responses appear to be broadly representative of Quakers in Scotland, although with a higher response from those who currently attend GM.

It would appear that the main reason more people do not attend General Meeting is the perceived intrusion on family and other commitments at the weekend followed by the time taken to travel to meetings. It does not appear that making changes to the format of General Meeting would significantly improve attendance, although there was some support for trying to have more interesting afternoon sessions, increasing the proportion of written reports and allowing more time for informal conversation.

A number of respondees confused General Meeting with other meetings (such as the Pluscarden weekend organised by North AM) or showed lack of understanding of the purpose and nature of GM. This suggests that we need to communicate the role of GM in a more effective way.

One particular issue on which opinions were sought was the future of the November 2-day residential GM. About half of those who responded on this felt that the residential GM should be discontinued, although a significant number of people made no comment. There was minority support for the residential GM to be replaced by less frequent residential family weekends at a conference centre.

Following a wide-ranging discussion, we agree that the 2 day GM planned for November 2016 should be held, but that no more 2 day GMs be planned. We will continue to meet 4 times a year, but one of those meetings will centre on worship and reflection with business kept to a minimum.

In all meetings we will take business in the afternoon and we ask the Agenda Function Group to consider the possibility of morning sessions following a consistent theme across several meetings with more opportunity for prayerful reflection. We ask Central Committee to consider ways in which we can spread understanding of the role and purpose of GM. We will consider the possibility of holding a separate all age summer residential gathering.

Min. 8 Report of Parliamentary Liaison Function Group

Elizabeth Allen has provided an update on the work of the PLFG and of the Parliamentary Engagement Officer. Arrangements have been finalised for the free symposium to be held as part of the Edinburgh Independent and Radical Bookfair on Saturday 29th October from 10 am - 11.50 am. Its title is *Creating A Just Scotland - Transforming our land and taxation policies*. It will be chaired by Sally Foster-Fulton and speakers will be Richard Murphy, Lesley Riddoch and Andy Wightman MSP. It has been funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust.

Work has continued on combating militarisation in schools and the Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament will have a preliminary hearing of our petition on 15th September. A briefing paper was prepared by the PLFG to accompany the GM minute to Meeting for Sufferings agreed at last GM. Friends are encouraged to contact their local education authority to discuss military visits to schools. Mairi and Elizabeth are to attend the SNP Conference for one day to talk about militarisation and housing issues. Once again white poppies will be sent to MSPs in October.

Min.9 Representation at meeting with First Minister

In previous years the Representative Friend has attended the annual meeting organised by the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office with the First Minister. We agree that from now on we should be represented by the convenor of the PLFG or substitute.

Min. 10 Enquirers' Weekend

Eight participants from six different meetings attended the Enquirers' Weekend from 2nd - 4th September at the Conforti Institute in Coatbridge organised on behalf of GM by SE Scotland Area Meeting. The weekend was led by Pat and Phil Lucas with assistance from Katrina McCrea. Evaluations were positive and a further weekend will be held in Inverness on 22nd October 2016 to cater for northern Friends who felt Coatbridge was too far to travel. A fuller report including the financial outcome will be submitted to next GM. We thank SE Scotland Area Meeting for organising this successful event.

Min. 11 Governance Arrangements for The Retreat Hospital, York

A letter has been received from John Miles, Clerk to Members at The Retreat, outlining the new arrangements for governance that have been agreed. The historic role that Friends have had as Members will be replaced by a Board of Trustee Directors, a majority of whom must be Quakers. There will no longer be a need for General Meeting for Scotland to appoint someone as a Member of The Retreat.

To replace the regular meetings of The Retreat Members, it has been suggested that there might be an Annual Quaker Forum on Mental Health which would provide an opportunity for Friends to continue to take a close interest in The Retreat's work. We are asked if we would support this suggestion, what role we would see the Forum playing and whether there are specific aspects of Friends' links with The Retreat that we would wish to maintain through the Forum.

We welcome the change in governance arrangements and the establishment of an annual forum to which we would try to send representatives.

Min. 12 Proposed ACTS Conference on Brexit

Following a meeting of Church representatives on 4th July attended by Elizabeth Allen and Pamala McDougall, ACTS is planning to organise a conference later in 2016 *"to explore the role of the churches in addressing social issues arising from Brexit, to explore more deeply the Christian understanding of unity and to seek ways of offering Gospel insights within the ongoing public debate"*. No further details of this conference are yet available.

Min. 13 Closing Minute

We record our thanks to North Scotland Friends for being our hosts at this GM, and look forward to meeting again in Perth in November.

Martin Burnell
Clerk