

Chapter 6

Yearly Meeting

HISTORY

- 6.01 Our yearly meeting grew out of a series of conferences of ministering Friends, some regional, some national. We may think of that at Swannington in 1654 or Balby in 1656 (the postscript to whose lengthy letter of counsel is so much better known than the letter itself) or Skipton the same year, or the general meeting for the whole nation held at Beckerings Park, the Bedfordshire home of John Crook, for three days in May 1658, and attended by several thousand Friends. This in some ways might be considered the first yearly meeting were it not for the fact that the 1660s, through persecution and pestilence, saw breaks in annual continuity. The meeting in May 1668 was followed by one at Christmastime, which lasted into 1669, since when the series has been unbroken. 1668, therefore, we have traditionally chosen as the date of establishment of London Yearly Meeting. But many (though not all) of the meetings up to 1677 were select, that is, confined to 'publick' (or ministering) Friends: from 1678 they were representative rather than select in character. Minutes are preserved from 1672.

The life of the yearly meeting centred until the mid-nineteenth century on the quarterly meeting answers to the queries and the 'Epistles Foreign and Domestick'. Epistles and travelling ministers between them made the Atlantic community of Friends a reality; smuggling in Cornwall or dissension in Nantucket received equal thought and attention. The education of Friends' children was a recurring theme, and with the establishment of Ackworth (1779) and Sidcot (1808) the reports of boarding schools made increasing claims on the time of the meeting. The answers (more and more stereotyped) to the queries, lengthy reports and other documents read aloud, the long-winded Friends, the narrow range of interest and minutiae of procedure - all must on occasion have been stifling to the rebels. 'And now for about an hour', wrote a young Friend in 1858,

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'the YM talked to points of order. When 5 or 6 courses are mentioned and a good many friends speak to each, it does not seem difficult to spend an hour or more in this way.' 'It is difficult', he added charitably, 'to see how this is altogether to be avoided.'

In fact, however, Yearly Meeting was probably seldom as parochial as the cautious minutes show, and even they point to certain outstanding sessions - the 1783 one on the slave trade, for instance; or that in 1818 on capital punishment. Yearly Meeting was not merely preoccupied with introspective consideration of the state of the Society: it sought to awaken the public conscience. A statement in 1856 on liberty of conscience was translated into half a dozen languages and taken by deputations of concerned Friends to ecclesiastics and statesmen from Madrid to St Petersburg. Petitions to parliament and memorials to the monarch covered a wide range of concern. When in 1842 Caroline Fox with her brother and father called on Carlyle, 'he wanted to know what we were doing at the Yearly Meeting, and what were its objects and functions, and remarked on the deepening observable amongst Friends; but when we told of the letter to the Queen recommendatory of peace in Afghanistan, he was terribly amused. "Poor little Queen! She'd be glad enough to live in peace and quietness if the Afghans would but submit to her conditions".'

'Every Quakeress', wrote Charles Lamb, 'is a lily; and when they come up in bands to their Whitsun-conferences, whitening the easterly streets of the metropolis, from all parts of the United Kingdom, they show like troops of the Shining Ones.' Women Friends had from the seventeenth century taken opportunity during the men's Yearly Meeting to confer together, but it was not until 1784 that a Women's Yearly Meeting was established, with the right to communicate with women's quarterly meetings. From the 1880s some joint sessions of men and women Friends were held, and in 1896 Yearly Meeting decided that 'in future women Friends are to be recognised as forming a constituent part of all our meetings for church affairs equally with their brethren'. Some separate sessions still continued but the Women's Yearly Meeting was laid down in 1907.

After the yearly meeting was constituted on a representative basis in 1678 ministering Friends, and later, elders, found occasion to meet

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with members of the Second Day Morning Meeting (the weekly gathering of 'ministering Friends in and about the city') at the beginning and the close of Yearly Meeting. This gathering, therefore, assumed a measure of national authority - it issued, for instance, in 1702 'A brief memorial of some necessary things' which was the basis of the advices on ministry - and in 1754 it was constituted as the Yearly Meeting of Ministers & Elders. In 1876 the meeting was enlarged in membership and re-named the Yearly Meeting on Ministry & Oversight, but as part of the egalitarian movement of the late nineteenth century it was decided to discontinue the separate hierarchy of preparative, monthly and quarterly meetings on ministry and oversight, and, in consequence, the Yearly Meeting on Ministry & Oversight last met in 1906. Elders and overseers subsequently met separately for conference.

Until as recently as 1861 Yearly Meeting was in theory composed only of representatives, together with 'such ministering Friends as may be in town, and the correspondents or members of the Meeting for Sufferings'. From the mid-eighteenth century (if not earlier) the doors were in fact open to any man Friend, and much business was in consequence referred to the Large Committee, which was confined to those constitutionally entitled to be there. When at length the Yearly Meeting sessions were opened to all men Friends as a right there was one, at least, who took a mournful view. 'The Yearly Meeting', he wrote, 'will become less and less of a *religious*, and more and more of a merely *popular*, assembly. The fruit of its deliberations, even at its best, will be liable to fall, in an unripe state, as "untimely figs", by a want of constancy and settlement in the *root of life*. There is, besides, great cause to dread, *that the talkative, unstable part in man, which should be silent in the churches, will presume to speak therein with increasing boldness, bringing forth confusion.*'

Whether or not we feel Daniel Pickard's predictions have been justified, we can indeed be thankful that in almost every generation there has been a Right Holding of Yearly Meeting Committee, though the exact title may have varied from one occasion to another. Such a group has the opportunity of deciding whether we need to direct our attention to constitutional change, or to the shortcomings of our human nature. In 1902 John Wilhelm Rowntree and Edward Worsdell applied their minds to the conduct of Yearly Meeting with devastating remarks: 'Discussion confused and futile', 'discussion

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disproportionate and prolix', 'a demonstration not a conference'. It was two years before this outburst that the first memorandum of agenda had been issued, and it had been agreed to print some reports in advance.

In 1905 Yearly Meeting was held for the first time out of London. Meeting at Leeds it received at its opening session a message from the venerable patriarch J Bevan Braithwaite, who after sixty-four years of unbroken attendance, felt the journey inadvisable. 'Coming together as we do', wrote the Yearly Meeting in its response, 'amid such new surroundings, the thought of the faithful lives of service which have been given in the past to the work of our Society comes with peculiar power and helpfulness to us, and as we listened to thy letter and thought of the long years in which thou wast present during the sittings of the yearly meeting, the desire arose that we might be more faithful in giving ourselves to the work.' We too may re-echo the desire that we may be inspired by those who have gone before us in our yearly meeting but not fettered by their procedures.

In 1994 London Yearly Meeting agreed to change its name to the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, or in short form, Britain Yearly Meeting. This decision followed a recommendation by Meeting for Sufferings after a consultation with monthly meetings. The new name was chosen to express the identity of the yearly meeting in a more inclusive way, so that Friends who were physically distant from London could feel more fully part of the whole. It also reflects more accurately the geographical area which is covered: England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The new name came into effect on 1 January 1995.

Yearly Meeting entered the twenty-first century with its sessions fulfilling a variety of purposes, including those listed here. It receives the annual report of Meeting for Sufferings and its committees. It provides an opportunity to scrutinise and affirms the work done in the name of Friends in our meetings and by our standing committees and staff. It lays matters of concern before the Yearly Meeting for divine guidance, testing or decision. It informs and educates us, as a meeting for learning. It agrees constitutional changes and amendments to our book of discipline. It strengthens our witness as a religious society and encourages us in our living of the testimonies.

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It inspires us to action, corporately in our meetings or individually and in groups. It searches our spiritual depths and refreshes our spiritual life as individuals and corporately. It reinforces the sense of community in our meetings and in Britain Yearly Meeting as a whole. It praises, gives thanks to God, and celebrates.

PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

- 6.02 We did conclude among ourselves to settle a meeting, to see one another's faces, and open our hearts one to another in the Truth of God once a year, as formerly it used to be.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1668

- 6.03 The intent and holy design of our annual assemblies, in their first constitution, were for a great and weighty oversight and Christian care of the affairs of the churches pertaining to our holy profession and Christian communion; that good order, true love, unity and concord may be faithfully followed and maintained among all of us.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1718

- 6.04 Yearly Meeting is an occasion when the concerns of one group of Friends or another can be shared with the meeting as a whole, as it seeks God's guidance and relates each particular insight or service to the others brought before it. At different stages of its history its agenda and pattern have been built up in different ways. There was a time when the main exercise related to 'the state of the Society' as revealed by the answers to the queries or, after written replies were discontinued, by triennial reports from quarterly meetings. The twentieth century witnessed a considerable growth in the number of standing committees of the Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings, and in their size and work, and increasingly the agenda of Yearly Meeting was built up round their concerns. An Agenda Committee (6.18) is charged with the duty of considering and deciding upon the business to be put before the Yearly Meeting.

- 6.05 *In 1999 the Agenda Committee wrote:*

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We see Yearly Meetings as events in the life of the institution of Britain Yearly Meeting which can involve:

- constitutional decision-making;
- annually overseeing and guiding the stewardship exercised between Yearly Meetings;
- settling policy on major areas of work or witness;
- promoting teaching and learning;
- offering inspiration and leadership;
- celebrating together;
- re-dedicating ourselves;
- calling us to action;
- creating and sustaining a community, including those both under and over 19.

Yearly Meetings are also occasions in which we can learn, practise, improve, and take back to our local meetings ways of conducting business which are rooted in Quaker tradition and our own experience yet also meet contemporary challenges. They should be a focus for every facet of Quakerism, constantly reminding us of what it means to be a Quaker today.

We are aware that we do not always achieve these purposes in our Yearly Meetings as well as we might; and indeed that it may not be possible to fulfil all the purposes to an equal extent at an individual Yearly Meeting. Seeking the right balance at any one Yearly Meeting is a necessary though difficult task. Our experience is that Yearly Meeting is most fruitful when its programme includes some decision-making and 'doing together', alongside more reflective sessions; and when it focuses on doing what only Yearly Meeting can do.

6.06 The agenda may comprise:

- a. minutes from area or general meetings and minutes or memoranda from standing committees of Meeting for Sufferings sharing with the yearly meeting as a whole some concern which has their united support;
- b. proposals for amendments to our book of discipline forwarded by Meeting for Sufferings or Yearly Meeting

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Agenda Committee in accordance with the process currently approved; details of this process may be obtained on application to the Recording Clerk;

- c. a summary of the proceedings of Meeting for Sufferings during the year, together with such reports as it may forward from committees on their work, together comprising the annual report (6.25);
- d. the financial report and audited accounts of the Yearly Meeting Funds for the preceding year (6.25);
- e. the tabular statement (6.07);
- f. the report of the Agenda Committee (6.18);
- g. testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of deceased Friends, forwarded by area and general meetings;
- h. epistles received from other yearly meetings and other Friends' bodies, reminding us of our membership in a world family of Friends;
- i. subjects initiated by the Agenda Committee (6.18);
- j. the report of the Quaker Stewardship Committee, certifying that every part of Britain Yearly Meeting is producing proper financial accounts and property records (14.28).

Items b, c, d, e & j are presented for consideration and acceptance, the *Trustees' annual report & accounts* having been approved by Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees (8.03) and forwarded by Meeting for Sufferings.

6.07 The tabular statement is a factual account of changes over the preceding year in the status and membership of the constituent meetings of the yearly meeting, together with other information on the membership of the yearly meeting, compiled by the Recording Clerk from information supplied by area meetings (4.10.h, 11.37).

6.08 In the course of reflecting on his experience as secretary from 1940 to 1945 of Friends War Victims Relief Committee and Friends Relief Service, Roger Wilson wrote in 1949:

Yearly Meeting is not, in the last resort, made up of a body of experts. People who know a great deal about the matter in hand may do most of the talking, central committee members familiar with the complexities of translating convictions into practical

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terms may appear to be leading the meeting. But a few halting yet sincere hesitations, uttered by a Friend from a small meeting in a distant county may, in fact, be of more significance in revealing a matter in its true setting than all the sophistication of the committee worthies. Again and again on deep issues it is reality as known and experienced by the simple and single-minded meeting, that does not know too much to have lost its simple faith, that guides the Society; and the central committee or its administrator who knows that its service is, in the end, related to the life of the local meetings in the country, will have a deep respect for the weight of Yearly Meeting.

- 6.09 No organisation or planning can produce a good Yearly Meeting if those who attend come for an inadequate reason. When the Religious Society of Friends gathers for its annual assembly, it does so because it seeks to come to know the mind of God on the various affairs to be brought forward... We are ordinary people, with the shortcomings of ordinary people, and there is laid upon us the necessity of patience with one another in all our gatherings, and especially in Yearly Meeting, and the willingness to accept the imperfect arising from our human limitations. When therefore we find our Yearly Meeting falling short of the standard which it should reach, whether in worship or in deliberation, it behoves each of us to listen more intently for the voice of the Spirit, and to seek the more earnestly that every contribution, be it by spoken word or in silence, is that which is in accord with the divine leading. In our worship at Yearly Meeting, it is laid upon us with special weight to listen. It is not our ministry that is required in worship, nor our inspiration in deliberations, but we seek to hear the true word of God speaking through our frail humanity and leading us to the place where he would have us be. This is the right holding of Yearly Meeting.

Right Holding of Yearly Meeting Committee, 1960

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6.10 *The service and counsel of John Morland (1837-1934):*

His attendance at Yearly Meeting was increasingly prized, and his personality felt to be a permeating influence. To the last his judgment retained its acuteness. How frequently in a few trenchant sentences he has cut through a problem or re-stated confused issues... The precepts laid down by him whilst clerk of Yearly Meeting (1899-1903) were scrupulously observed by himself: 'Do not speak without a sense of the imperative ought; speak audibly, not loudly but clearly; speak shortly.'

Testimony of Mid-Somerset Monthly Meeting, 1934

6.11 *Mary Hughes (1860-1941) comes with heart and mind prepared:*

Anyone who lived with her during April and May knew how intensely Friends' Yearly Meeting was on her mind. It was as important to her as 'going up to Jerusalem'. For weeks beforehand it came into her prayers in the morning, at meal times and with friends. She wished that God's power would be in the meetings, that people would go forth from them with a new vision of God's work for them, a new sensitiveness towards their fellows, especially the distressed.

Rosa Hobhouse, 1949

CONSTITUTION

- 6.12 Britain Yearly Meeting in session is the final constitutional authority of the Religious Society of Friends in England, Scotland*, Wales†, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Its membership consists of all those who belong to the several area meetings in Great Britain, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. All members of the yearly meeting have the right to attend and to take part in its deliberations. In order to provide for a due attendance, each area meeting is to ensure that a sufficient number of Friends will undertake to be present. Public statements to be made in the name of the Religious

* On the responsibilities of General Meeting for Scotland see 5.03.

† On the responsibilities of the Meeting of Friends in Wales see 5.04-5.05.

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Society of Friends in Great Britain, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man must be authorised by Britain Yearly Meeting or by Meeting for Sufferings (3.27).

Clerks

- 6.13 The Yearly Meeting shall at its first session appoint, on the nomination of the Committee on Clerks (6.19), a clerk and two assistant clerks. The clerks shall hold office until the first session of the ensuing Yearly Meeting.

Visiting Friends

- 6.14 Members of the Society not belonging to Britain Yearly Meeting may attend the sessions of the Yearly Meeting on producing a minute or letter of introduction signed by the clerk of their own meeting or otherwise satisfying the clerk of their membership. However, Friends in sojourning membership of an area meeting (11.28) are exempt from this requirement.

Permission to non-members

- 6.15 Permission for the attendance of non-members at one or more sessions may be given at the discretion of the clerk, if satisfied that their presence is likely to be of service to the Society. Such permission should be sought well in advance of Yearly Meeting and should be supported by one or more elders to whom the applicant is well known. Last-minute requests should not be made. Elders supporting applications should ensure that non-members receive suitable support and guidance to enable them to be of service and to benefit from attendance at Yearly Meeting. If called to speak in a Yearly Meeting session, non-members should be sensitive to the fact that they are not in membership and should make this known.

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Time of meeting

- 6.16 Yearly Meeting shall normally meet in May, but approximately one meeting in four shall be held residentially in the summer. The dates and places at which Yearly Meeting is to be held shall be determined by Meeting for Sufferings on the recommendation of the Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee. Meeting for Sufferings shall have the power to summon a Special Yearly Meeting (7.02.f).

Yearly Meeting committees

- 6.17 The following committees are appointed in whole or in part by Yearly Meeting, for continuing work after its conclusion: Agenda Committee (6.18), Committee on Clerks (6.19), Central Nominations Committee (6.21), Quaker Stewardship Committee (14.29).

In order to facilitate the business of Yearly Meeting the following committees shall be appointed at an early session: Nominating Group (6.22), Epistle Drafting Committee (6.23), Committee to Examine Minutes (6.24). The service of these committees ceases at the close of Yearly Meeting, save only in the case of the Nominating Group which shall serve until the first session of the ensuing Yearly Meeting. Additionally Yearly Meeting may appoint, on the nomination of the Central Nominations Committee, at an early session two Friends to serve on the Arrangements Committee (6.20) for the period of Yearly Meeting. Yearly Meeting may decide to set up, or request Meeting for Sufferings to set up, other committees or ad hoc groups for special tasks.

Agenda Committee

- 6.18 The planning of the agenda for, and the use of the premises during, Yearly Meeting shall be in the hands of the Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, which shall consult as may be necessary with standing

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committees, general and area meetings and the Meeting of Friends in Wales.

The membership of the Agenda Committee shall be as follows:

- a. the clerk and assistant clerks of Yearly Meeting together with any other Friend nominated by the Committee on Clerks to serve as clerk or assistant clerk of the next Yearly Meeting;
- b. nine Friends appointed by Yearly Meeting for a three-year period on the recommendation of the Central Nominations Committee, one third retiring annually though eligible for re-appointment;
- c. nine Friends appointed by Meeting for Sufferings for a three-year period on the recommendation of the Central Nominations Committee, one third retiring annually though eligible for re-appointment;
- d. one Friend appointed by Yearly Meeting for a three-year period on the recommendation of Quaker Life Central Committee for the children and young people's programme (8.10).

The Agenda Committee shall:

- e. appoint such subcommittees of its members as are from time to time required;
- f. appoint annually three or more of its members to serve on the Arrangements Committee (6.20);

The Agenda Committee is responsible for liaison with the planning committee appointed by Yearly Meeting to oversee the arrangements for each residential Summer Gathering (6.26, 6.27).

The Agenda Committee works closely with Meeting for Sufferings and its standing committees to promote the right holding of Yearly Meeting, to foster the Agenda Committee's relationship with them, and to integrate the work of the committee into the budgeted programme of central work of the Britain Yearly Meeting. It keeps under review the longer-term evolution of the institution of Yearly Meeting in session and the pattern of its gatherings over time, in relation to organisational and spiritual development in the life of the

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Society. Its terms of reference may be obtained on application to the Recording Clerk.

Committee on Clerks

- 6.19 The Committee on Clerks is responsible for considering the short, medium and long term clerkship needs of the Yearly Meeting.

The Committee on Clerks acts as the nominating body for clerks of Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings, Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and Summer Gatherings. It brings forward:

- a. to Yearly Meeting, annually, names of a Friend to serve as clerk and two Friends to serve as assistant clerks of Yearly Meeting;
- b. to Meeting for Sufferings, annually, names of Friends to serve as clerk and assistant clerk of Meeting for Sufferings;
- c. to Yearly Meeting, annually, names of Friends to serve as clerk and assistant clerk of the Trustees;
- d. to Yearly Meeting, two years before each Summer Gathering, names of Friends to serve as clerks of the Summer Gathering.

The Committee on Clerks consists of thirteen members including a clerk appointed by the committee from within its number. One-third of the members other than the clerk will retire annually at the rise of Yearly Meeting, and are eligible for reappointment. These Friends shall serve for no more than six continuous years. The clerk is appointed for a three-year period and may serve for a maximum of nine continuous years on the committee.

Arrangements Committee

- 6.20 The Agenda Committee shall appoint annually three or more of its members who shall, with the clerk and assistant clerks of Yearly Meeting, serve as an Arrangements Committee. Yearly Meeting may at an early session appoint, on the nomination of the Central Nominations Committee, two further Friends to serve on this committee for the period of Yearly Meeting.

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The Arrangements Committee shall act on behalf of the Agenda Committee between meetings. It shall consider any alterations which may appear to be required in the agenda whether before or during Yearly Meeting, any application received too late for consideration by the Agenda Committee for the use of the premises during Yearly Meeting, and any questions referred to it for the better ordering of the Yearly Meeting. It shall decide which testimonies concerning deceased Friends (6.06.g) and epistles from yearly meetings and other Friends' bodies (6.06.h) are to be read in the sessions.

Central Nominations Committee

- 6.21 The Central Nominations Committee is a standing committee appointed by Yearly Meeting (6.22) to bring forward names for service as required both by Yearly Meeting in session and by Meeting for Sufferings. It consists of twenty-seven members, with one-third of the members retiring annually at the rise of Yearly Meeting and not eligible for immediate reappointment. The clerk and assistant clerk are appointed by the committee from within its number and may serve a further year beyond the initial appointment period.

The Central Nominations Committee brings forward names to each Yearly Meeting for the following appointments:

- a. Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee: three Friends to serve for three years (6.18);
- b. Yearly Meeting Arrangements Committee: two Friends to serve during the period of Yearly Meeting (6.20);
- c. Epistle Drafting Committee: five to seven Friends to serve during the period of Yearly Meeting, including one to act as convener (6.23);
- d. Yearly Meeting Elders as required by the Yearly Meeting;
- e. Yearly Meeting Overseers as required by the Yearly Meeting;
- f. Yearly Meeting Accessibility and Support Group: numbers required by the terms of reference (which may be obtained on application to the Recording Clerk);
- g. Yearly Meeting Publications Group for *Quaker faith & practice*: one Friend to serve for three years;

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- h. Quaker Stewardship Committee: three Friends to serve for three years (14.29);
- i. Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees: five Friends to serve for three years (8.03).

When due or required, it also brings in names of Friends to serve on the Summer Gathering Planning Committee (6.27), on ad hoc groups or for any other appointments requested by Yearly Meeting.

When interim appointments to any of these bodies are required, the Central Nominations Committee may bring forward names to Meeting for Sufferings, which acts on behalf of Yearly Meeting.

The Central Nominations Committee acts for Meeting for Sufferings, in bringing forward names for appointments of Meeting for Sufferings' representatives to Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee (6.18); for appointments to the central committees, standing committees and Trusts appointed by Meeting for Sufferings (8.03 - 8.10; 8.14 - 8.20); and as representatives to various bodies, for service on ad hoc groups or for any other appointments requested by Meeting for Sufferings.

The committee works closely with each body on which vacancies arise in order to clarify the requirements, which may include the need for representatives from other bodies.

Yearly Meeting Nominating Group

- 6.22 Nominations for appointment to the Central Nominations Committee and the Committee on Clerks are made by the Yearly Meeting Nominating Group. The group consists of six to eight Friends appointed in a Yearly Meeting session each year: a convener nominated by the previous Nominating Group and the remainder on nomination from the body of the meeting. The group meets and consults as necessary during the period up to the next Yearly Meeting, including with the Central Nominations Committee and the Committee on Clerks, to enable it to bring nominations to that Yearly Meeting, as follows:

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- a. annually, four Friends to serve on the Committee on Clerks for a three-year period from the rise of the Yearly Meeting (6.19);
- b. annually, nine Friends to serve on the Central Nominations Committee for a three-year period from the rise of the Yearly Meeting (6.21);
- c. Friends to fill casual vacancies on these two bodies;
- d. one Friend to serve as convener of the next Yearly Meeting Nominating Group.

Epistle Drafting Committee

- 6.23 The Yearly Meeting shall at its first session appoint, on the nomination of the Central Nominations Committee, an Epistle Drafting Committee, of which one member shall be named as convener. Yearly Meeting shall, at an appropriate stage in its deliberations, offer guidance on the content of the epistle. The draft of the epistle shall be made available to Friends for written comment and shall be submitted to Yearly Meeting for approval, normally at the beginning of the final session. The epistle as approved shall be read in the concluding session of Yearly Meeting and signed by the clerk.

Committee to Examine Minutes

- 6.24 The Yearly Meeting shall at its first session appoint not more than ten Friends, who shall arrange a rota whereby two of their number shall examine the minutes of the meeting at the close of each session and correct any slight inaccuracies that may be found. If any substantial alterations appear to be required they are to be proposed at the next session prior to any other business.

Documents

- 6.25 Any communication to the Yearly Meeting from a general or area meeting, from the Meeting of Friends in Wales, Six Weeks Meeting or Young Friends General Meeting shall be in the form of a minute

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signed by the clerk of such meeting, as shall communications from Meeting for Sufferings and from committees of the Yearly Meeting.

The Agenda Committee, in arranging the subjects to be brought before Yearly Meeting, is encouraged to prepare concise but lucid memoranda which can be printed in *Documents in advance* and circulated in ample time to allow not only for individual study but for discussion in local meetings.

The *Proceedings* of the Yearly Meeting comprise *Documents in advance*, including the *Annual report of Meeting for Sufferings and its committees*, the *Trustees' annual report & accounts* for the preceding year, the tabular statement, the report of the Agenda Committee, testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of deceased Friends, the epistles received from other yearly meetings and Friends' bodies, and the printed minutes of Yearly Meeting.

Summer Gatherings

- 6.26 Yearly Meeting Summer Gatherings are residential events held from time to time, usually week-long every four years, as determined by Meeting for Sufferings on the recommendation of Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee. The first was held in Bradford in 1991.
- 6.27 During the 1970s and 1980s residential Yearly Meetings (6.16) were becoming increasingly popular, with Friends appreciating the events alongside the sessions as much as the business. Hence it was decided to try out a gathering without the formal Yearly Meeting business, answering the needs of Friends to live together in community and to explore issues and activities for which there was little programmed time at a meeting for church affairs. Summer Gatherings have clearly answered this need and they are now a valued part of the Britain Yearly Meeting schedule.

The aims of Summer Gatherings are:

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to strengthen and support the witness and activity of Friends by continuing the personal friendships, spiritual inspiration and momentum that residential gatherings provide;
to provide time, at a more leisurely pace than is normally possible during Yearly Meeting, for the exploration of those issues and concerns which by their nature require such time;
to provide the space for exploration of issues and concerns in groups or other diverse ways;
to provide the time and facilities for study and real learning;
to involve as many Friends and attenders of all ages as possible in active participation; this should include activities for all ages.

Attendance at a Summer Gathering is open to all Friends and attenders by application, within the numerical limits agreed beforehand.

The events are organised by a Summer Gathering Planning Committee appointed by Yearly Meeting (6.21) and working in liaison with the Agenda Committee (6.18). A copy of the terms of reference of the Planning Committee may be obtained on application to the Recording Clerk.

The clerks of Summer Gatherings are appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of the Committee on Clerks (6.19), and serve also as the clerks of the Planning Committee.

The Summer Gathering may communicate by minute to Yearly Meeting via the Agenda Committee, or to Meeting for Sufferings.

Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings

- 6.28 Yearly Meeting delegates to Meeting for Sufferings, as its standing representative body (7.02-7.03) in the intervals between Yearly Meetings, deliberation, discernment and the oversight of our corporate religious life. Meeting for Sufferings also receives regular interim reports for information and consultation from the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees.

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Meeting for Sufferings is largely (7.06.a, b, c & d) appointed by Yearly Meeting in session, to which it reports annually. Yearly Meeting in session remains the final constitutional authority (6.12), to which Meeting for Sufferings is accountable.

Yearly Meeting also entrusts to Meeting for Sufferings the organisation and periodic revision of the structure of standing committees which oversee particular areas of the central work undertaken on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting as a whole. However, it reserves to itself decisions affecting the existence and basic functions of Quaker Life (8.08) and Quaker Peace & Social Witness (8.09) as central committees. While Meeting for Sufferings may modify their composition and terms of reference, as for its other standing committees, the essential place of these two central committees and the work they represent in the yearly meeting organisation may not be altered without the approval of Yearly Meeting in session.

Other changes in the structure of standing committees through which Meeting for Sufferings works must be reported to Yearly Meeting (7.02); in such cases, any church government amendments proposed reflect decisions of Meeting for Sufferings already taken, and it is for Yearly Meeting to decide whether the proposed textual changes to our book of discipline accurately describe the new structure.

Meeting for Sufferings is entrusted with the general care of matters affecting Britain Yearly Meeting in its life and witness. It has a particular care for its central work organisation and church government, including the preparation of constitutional amendments for Yearly Meeting in session to consider.