**Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) Report**

This was the report of the weekend at Woodbrooke, 4-6 October 2019

**Peace and Witness**

We recalled the occasion of the visit of Mohandas Gandhi’s visit in 1931, and we discussed the meaning of peace and witness at the time of Gandhi’s visit in 1931 and what it means now. How should concerns be tested? How can this be put into practice when many feel moved by Extinction Rebellion?

**Sustainability Matters**

MfS has oversight of Friends’ commitment to becoming a sustainable community. Eden Grace, our Swarthmore lecturer, showed (on video) how actions on climate can be rooter in Quaker faith. There are many approaches to this work – guerrilla gardening, personal lifestyle changes and also actions by AMs/LMs switching to green energy suppliers. Martin Ford of Quaker Stewardship committee (QSC) discusses the work of Friends in this respect, citing Greta Thunburg’s appearance at Friends House, a great achievement of working with other organisations.

Another representative talked of how it was important to stay deeply connected spiritually . “When you trust the Spirit things can change very quickly. We need to stay with our ministry and not let guilt get in the way. When we do that we may be surprised at how the world will turn.”Another contributor said, “It’s linked to living a simple life, in which we can work with our neighbours to build sustainable communities.”

**Meeting-centred support**

Caroline Nursey, Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) spoke about simplifying structures and procedures. Trustees had also been working on the new strategy for Woodbrooke, taking learning to Quakers in the nations and regions. Caroline discussed potential development works at Friends House, and contributing to a coalition aiming to make charity investments take any impact on climate change into account. Work was also being done on offering Meeting-centred support and moving towards a more dispersed society.

**Assisted dying and end-of-life issues**

MfS has been looking at end-of-life issues throughout the last decade. Staffordshire AM and North West London AM brought a concern: should medically assisted death in certain circumstances be allowed in law? Should this concern be sent to AMs for their consideration? What other ways could Quakers explore this concern? What could Quakers specifically bring to this issue? There is a wide spectrum of opinion. There is much more exploration to be done.

**Safeguarding**

In 2014 the then Home Secretary Theresa May announced an Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). The Inquiry has asked the Religious Society of Friends, along with other faith bodies, to contribute to an investigation into child protection. MfS received a paper explaining more about the Inquiry, and looked at how Friends should respond. Friends were reminded of our Society’s ongoing commitment to: ‘the care, respect and nurture of all vulnerable groups encountered within Quaker activities; the safeguarding and protection of children and other vulnerable people; the promotion of a culture of good practice in relation to activities promoted by Quaker Meetings and groups; and maintaining and developing procedures and good practice guidelines’.

**Quaker Stewardship Committee (QSC)**

This committee, which helps and guides Meetings in the stewardship of their finance and property, has no formal relationship with Meeting for Sufferings. This was, however an opportunity to communicate with the body at a time when Meetings were being encouraged to simplify their ways of working. Significant changes in which Area and Local Meetings are supported were being planned. Friends were revising the church government sections of Quaker Faith and Practice, and Meetings were grappling with the increased burden of external regulation being imposed on charities, includingchurches.

BYM is carrying out a review of QSC, due for report in 2021. MfS was asked to consider how Meetings could be helped to keep sight of the spiritual basis of their stewardship, along with how to manage the strategic direction of AMs. Why are people not coming forward to serve? Have you anything you would like to tell us?

**Speaking out and advocacy**

Anne von Staveren, BYM’s media relations office, and Grace Da Costa, public affairs and advocacy manager, about how the Yearly Meeting speaks out on matters of concern to the Society. There are many ways of telling the Quaker story – print, broadcast, social media, blogs , social media, website, collaboration, engagement and publications. It is important to be clear about the intended audience. As a light aside to the seriousness of their message, they talked about ‘6 things you never knew were invented by Quakers’, which included Red Delicious apples and sanitary towels. Someone asked: “How do you deal with adverse comments on social media?” “Slowly”, said Anne.