**1. The post-truth world: Guidance for Clerks**

**What’s the question?**

Please feel free to consider any aspect of this concern. It may be helpful if Friends could explore these questions:

* In your experience, do you agree that we are living in a post-truth world?
* Do you share this concern with Southern Marches? If so, what commitment can you make (individually and corporately) to taking this forward?
* Is there something particular that Quakers, as a faith body, are called to do? If so, how do you express this?
* If you are not clear yet - what other questions might need to be explored?

There are also some questions towards the end of Helen Drewery’s paper, below.

**How should you test this?**

This is up to you, and Quakers in your AM, group or committee. You might ask local meetings to consider it; ask a small group of Friends to explore; set time aside, or arrange a special session. For a gathering, you could appoint a facilitator; the papers could be read aloud at the start, and/or you could ask Friends to read them beforehand.

If you need clarification or more information, or perhaps want to invite a speaker, please contact Helen Drewery, Head of Witness and Worship, who will be able to help.

If you can’t give time to this, please just let us know.

**What is a Quaker concern?**

Chapter 13 of Quaker faith and practice has helpful guidance about the Quaker understanding of concern, and how Meetings can discern ways forward.

**When and how should you respond?**

Please send your minute or written response by Monday 15 October by email to

sufferings@quaker.org.uk or by post to Graham Spackman at Friends House.

**Preparing your minute**

Some or all of the following text *may* be helpful for clerks when drafting minutes. It is *not* essential that you use this text.

Any minute could start and conclude with these paragraphs:

*The post-truth world and Quaker response*

*We have received a minute from Meeting for Sufferings, MfS/18/04/09 The post-truth world and Quaker response, with accompanying papers. They set out a concern held in Southern Marches Area Meeting about the need to restore truth and integrity in the public sphere.*

 *…*

*We send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings.*

It may be helpful to explain the ways in which you have considered this matter.

If you unite with the concern and are called to active witness you might add:

*We unite with this concern, and have agreed to respond with the following actions…*

If you recognise the concern but do not feel called to action you might record:

*We unite with this concern in spirit, but at this time do not feel led, corporately, to take action.*

If you do not unite with this concern you might note:

*After consideration, we are not led to unite with this concern. [You may wish to explain why.]*

If you have not considered the matter you could record:

*We have not been able to pay attention to this matter at this time. [You may wish to explain why.]*

If you have additional material, you are welcome to send it with you minute. (Bearing in mind that nearly 80 bodies are represented on Meeting for Sufferings, it may not be possible to include all the details in MfS Agenda papers.)

**How do we respond?**

Please send minutes, or notes, or any other response, to Meeting for Sufferings, either by email to sufferings@quaker.org.uk; or by post to the Deputy Recording Clerk, Friends House.

**What’s the deadline?**

Please send your responses to reach us by 29 October - earlier if possible. If this isn’t possible, but you would be able to consider the matter later in the year, please let us know.

Juliet Prager

Deputy Recording Clerk

May 2018

**2. Minute of Meeting for Sufferings held on 7 April 2019**

**MfS/18/04/09 The post-truth world and Quaker response**

We receive minute 18/06 of Southern Marches Area Meeting held on 13 January 2018. The Area Meeting has been considering the question of restoring truth and integrity in the public sphere, and their leadings as individuals, as local meetings and as an area meeting.

Friends in Southern Marches AM are concerned about a lack of honesty in public affairs; and that in turn this impacts on how we live Quaker values in the world. The AM recognises that we need to begin with ourselves before pointing the finger at others; to be open to listening to those with whom we disagree (including via social media), and communicate with those who do not share our views. We have also been reminded about work within our Yearly Meeting in 1990 – 2004 under the heading ‘Truth and Integrity in Public Affairs’, which was laid down at a time when the energy and sense of urgent leading in the concern had abated.

MfS has heard a clear call to test this concern more widely and will send this minute and the briefing papers to Area Meetings. We ask Friends to consider this concern, to send any relevant minutes for our further discernment and to share news of any work they are already doing. We expect to return to this matter in November.

In Friendship



Anne Ullathorne

Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

## **3. Southern Marches Area Quaker Meeting / Cyfarfod Y Crynwyr Rhanbarth Y Gororau Deheuol: minute written at the meeting held on 13 January 2018**

### AM18/06 'Post-truth world' - What can we do?

Further to Minute AM17/85 of 9 July 2017, we have returned to the question of restoring truth and integrity in the public sphere. Since that meeting, minutes have been received from three local meetings: Ross-on-Wye, Clun Valley and Hereford. All LM minutes received to date on this matter are set out in the attached document.

We have considered what we are led to do as individuals, as local meetings and as an area meeting.

We need to begin with ourselves before we point the finger at others. As individuals we should be more open to listening to those we do not agree with (including via social media), and not just talk to those who share our views. We should also consider reading newspapers promoting different views from our own, and writing letters to them.

The intense scrutiny of pronouncements by those in the public eye makes them cautious about speaking honestly. On the other hand, the social media tend to polarise views. It is important to listen sympathetically and be moderate in our response, so that we can build bridges. Different spheres of life need different responses in holding people to account. People often have good reasons for holding particular ideas. We should support those - especially politicians - who have the grace to change their minds. We need to beware of allowing the strength of our convictions to betray us into 'making statements or allegations that are untrue or unfair' (Advice 17).

Challenging those who have different views is distinct from challenging those who consciously mislead the public, with the intention of dissuading people from taking action on matters of concern.

At Area Meeting level, we would like to hold a workshop on truth and integrity. We ask Elders and Overseers to look into making arrangements for such an event.

We feel that the situation has changed radically. The lack of honesty in public affairs is impacting on all our testimonies, and the challenge to living out our Quaker values is greater than ever. We see this issue as integral to the aspiration expressed in Our Faith in the Future for Quaker values to be active in the world. We wish the matter to be taken up at national level. We hope that our Yearly Meeting might be a public champion of truth.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to test this concern, and in particular to consider reviving the programme on Truth and Integrity in Public Affairs, which was laid down some years ago. We know that this concern is shared with others beyond the Quaker world, and we would wish Friends to work with others, as described in Our Faith in the Future.

However, we acknowledge that if we take this concern seriously, we will have to commit ourselves to constant vigilance and repeated action to counter false information. We have asked ourselves whether we have the right to call on others to act if we do not show that level of commitment ourselves.

Stevie Krayer, clerk

**4. Reflections to help consideration**

This paper gives some background to help consideration of the minute sent by Southern Marches Area Quaker Meeting/ Cyfarfod Y Crynwyr Rhanbarth Y Gororau Deheuol – ‘'’Post-truth world' - What can we do?”

A number of other individual Friends and meetings have expressed their concerns about truth and integrity in the last year or two.

Pendle Hill Area Meeting has considered aspects of it too, thrown up by their concern on fracking. They were troubled by national and local government decision making processes. The two related issues went to Meeting for Sufferings in February 2017, and Sufferings sent a minute to QPSWCC, who asked staff to keep a watching brief.

General Meeting for Scotland wrestled with it, but concluded in 2017 that, at this time, they did not recognise a religious leading and could not see a way forward for any specific Quaker work to address the lack of integrity in society and particularly government.

It is possible that this is a re-emerging concern for local meetings or for the Society as a whole, but if so, it has not yet found a focus.

There are multiple strands in this concern, including: integrity in the media, personal integrity of those in power, and integrity in our political systems. My thanks to Jessica Metheringham, Parliamentary Engagement Officer, for helping to draft these sections below. Following them, we have included a brief history of the ‘Truth and Integrity in Public Affairs’ work done in 1990 – 2004.

**Integrity in the media**

One of the issues which is much discussed in the wider community is fake news. Different news outlets often accuse each other of misrepresenting the facts, or of participating in “clickbait churnalism” where journalistic standards are seen as less important than audience figures.

At the simplest level, a testimony to truth and integrity means that Quakers do not support lies being told or misleading information being spread. A deeper reading of integrity means that Quakers are also concerned about the black-and-white nature of some of the rebuttals. Reality is full of nuances and subtle details, and in some areas fact-checking is not the most appropriate response. Many issues are less to do with the facts than with subjective opinions or perspectives.

It is important to remember that “the people” speak with multiple voices. One common assumption is that the only reason for disagreement is lack of knowledge. Another assumption is that to disagree with someone is to dismiss their experience entirely – we maintain that it is possible to agree with the symptoms while disagreeing with their diagnosis.

**Personal integrity of those in power**

Through much of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM)’s work we aim to both challenge those who make decisions and to support them in their work. While corruption in politics undoubtedly exists, the majority of people who enter politics do so in order to serve. Quakers aim to support them, rather than questioning their motives every time they make a decision with which we disagree.

The systems of power can produce a bubble. BYM aims to help decision-makers hear from people outside of that bubble. It also works to help voters understand what power their representatives do or do not have, and to recognise that public opinion is often divided.

**Integrity of our political systems**

If Quakers are concerned about the truthfulness of our information and the integrity of people in politics, then we should also be concerned about the system within which it all operates. Currently, voters in Britain use a combination of proportional representation, mixed, and non-proportional representation systems. While Quakers often have different opinions, those supporting a particular electoral system can be upheld and supported.

Then there is how the general public participate in politics. Quakers in Britain have a tradition of engaging with political life (Quaker faith and practice 1.34: ‘Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.’). This leads many Quakers to seek opportunities for civil engagement, whether through consultations, campaigns or conversations with elected representatives. It is notable that it is often considerably easier to engage with the Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly than with the UK Parliament.

**Previous work - the Truth and Integrity in Public Affairs (TIPA) concern – 1990 to 2004**

Robin Robison, a young Friend who had been working in the Cabinet Office, was troubled by the secrecy of the Joint Intelligence Committee and the lack of accountability of the secret services. His concern was supported by his Monthly Meeting and came to MfS and, unusually, to Yearly Meeting in 1990. Yearly Meeting united with the concern. Part of their minute forms 23.91 of *Qf&p*:

*We are deeply uneasy about the increasing secrecy which permeates our process of government. We see this in the 1989 Official Secrets Act, which no longer allows the defence of the right of disclosure in the public interest. We have been led to the conviction that, despite a culture of state secrecy, we must strive to bring about openness in our country. Secrecy bolsters power and leads to deceit and the abuse of power. At times a sensitive reticence is required but, in working in the spirit of love and trust rather than fear, we seek to discern the boundary between that reticence and secrecy.*

Individual Friends elsewhere in the YM were also under a sense of personal concern and doing work themselves, including Friends in Warwickshire Monthly Meeting. Some of them became part of an ad hoc group set up by Meeting for Sufferings to explore how the concern should be put into action. The Quaker Committee on Truth and Integrity in Public Affairs (TIPA) started work in early 1991. Robin Robison was employed to take the work forward with and under the guidance of the committee.

Their focus in the early days was on moral values in political life, excessive secrecy, executive power being exercised without accountability and use of the royal prerogative. In practice, they worked on a possible private member's bill on the accountability of the intelligence and security services, and when the government published a bill on this subject, they responded, asking for it to be strengthened.

They had a series of meetings with MI5 – this was at a time when MI5 had only recently been acknowledged to exist. At one point they had doubts about whether such meetings were worth continuing, and took the question to the Central Committee of Quaker Social Responsibility & Education (a predecessor body to QPSW) who advised that they needed to be well focussed if they were to meet with MI5 again. The committee at that time felt they were not ready, though did have further meetings later.

Robin Robison was seen as a controversial whistleblower and had a high public profile. He was repeatedly approached by the media. After taking part in TV programme 'World in Action' there were even accusations in the press that he was a traitor.

TIPA wrote a booklet called 'Witness to Truth', ran a seminar on moral values in public life and produced a study pack on National Security. They built connections in Europe and with other churches. They ran a series of conferences for Friends and produced newsletters and briefings. They invited Friends to help them to do research on their local governments and to write to MPs.

In 1993 the Meeting for Sufferings TIPA committee was laid down and the work was brought under the care of QSRE. At that time, the outgoing committee wrote:

'The heart of the concern ...is our experience that in our national life there is an increasing disintegration with many people unable to participate. We have a vision of an open society. It is at the heart of Quaker experience that respect between individuals can provide the true basis of community.'

In 1995 the new committee wrote: 'Our experience and research over the last 5 years convinces us that morality is not simple, in this we recognise that we ourselves and perhaps Friends generally need to determine just how much covert activity is acceptable within a civilised and democratic country. We are within and part of the world, and all its problems of good and evil. If we are part of the problem, we need to be part of the solution. … We would wish to see information used in such a way that nobody in society is disadvantaged or disempowered … It may be that we can contribute … by focusing on the use and abuses of information; power lies in the control of information.'

In 1996 they issued a public statement on the Scott Report, the judicial inquiry into arms sales to Iraq.

From about that time onwards, there was a shift in emphasis of the work, towards 'ways in which economic interests compromise truth and integrity'.

In 2001, under the newly-formed Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee, the work was brought under the care of a new Public Affairs Committee. By then TIPA had much less staff time allocated to it. The energy, the sense of urgent leading in the concern seems to have abated by then. It was formally laid down in 2004, by the following minute:

**QPSWCC 04/43 The future of truth and integrity in public affairs (TIPA) programme**

We have received a paper prepared by Robin Robison, Programme Manager, TIPA, and Helen Drewery, which gives background to the TIPA work, the minute of a consultation held on 29th November 2003, and minute 9 from Public Affairs Group meeting 11th February 2004, and we note minute 04/12 of Testimonies Committee held 27-29th February 2004.

We feel that the time is right to lay down this particular programme of work. We ask for revised terms of reference for the Public Affairs Group to be brought to our next meeting.

We recognise however, as the minute of the consultation day concludes that:

“….truth and integrity (is) a basic Quaker Testimony and so the work is not solely for a department or an individual – it needs to be something all Friends hold to in the way they live their whole lives and it should underpin all Quaker work…..”

Although the issues have not gone away, there does not seem to be useful work currently that QPSW can do.

Our work will continue to challenge secrecy and strive for accountability where we encounter it, for example through the Economic Issues work, the Parliamentary Liaison work, and in QUNO.

We remain open to the possibility, as with all our work, of new opportunities emerging for an appropriate piece of centrally managed work in this area that reflects the thinking of Friends in their local meetings. We suggest that a conference for Friends who face dilemmas relating to truth and integrity in their working lives could be helpful. We ask staff to identify when and where this might be held and how it might be overseen.

We thank all who have contributed to and worked for this programme over the years.

We send this minute to Public Affairs Group and to Testimonies Committee.

**Conclusion**

A Quaker concern for truth and integrity in public life is not new, but changes in politics and the media may mean that it is becoming more important to us.

Testing this concern, it may be useful to consider:

* do we feel there is already a specific BYM position on any of the strands of this concern? If not, should there be?
* do we feel there is a ‘Quaker-shaped gap’ in the responses of other organisations?
* where, if anywhere, are we being led to act at this time?

Helen Drewery

Head of Witness and Worship