

# Yearly Meeting Gathering Bath 2014



## What it means to be a Quaker today Commitment and belonging

“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 convincement, 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.”

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

This summer Friends from across Britain and beyond will be in Bath for our third Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG). This will be an occasion for deep discernment, loving fellowship, joy and celebration. Whether we are going or not, we all have a responsibility as Friends to prepare for our Yearly Meeting. Grounding our deliberations in the earlier prayerful consideration of the theme in our local meetings can lead to deeper unity when we meet as Britain Yearly Meeting in session.

This YMG sees the culmination of our three-year exploration of ‘What it means to be a Quaker today’. This theme has struck a chord with many Friends. There was an overwhelming response last year to the online forum set up to collect feedback to the queries sent out with the preparation document. These queries concerned about how Friends discern the right way forward, how we work together and our experience of being guided by the Spirit when making decisions.

At that Yearly Meeting we also explored the spiritual basis of trusteeship and of service. These questions have continued to resonate.

This year the focus is on commitment and belonging, including an exploration of what membership means for Friends.

A Gathering offers us opportunities to develop and deepen our consideration of the theme in a range of ways. Varied opportunities will be offered in plenary sessions, special interest meetings and option sessions, and there will be a series of ‘Journeys’ running across three of the afternoons, many of them linked to the theme.

There will also be a time to remember the beginning of World War I, its impact on Quakers and others, and the witness that flowed from it.

Yearly Meeting Gathering will be held at the University of Bath from 2 to 9 August 2014. For more information please contact the Yearly Meeting Gathering office at [ymg@quaker.org.uk](mailto:ymg@quaker.org.uk) or call 020 7663 1040.

Photo credits: pages 2 and 3 Mike Pinches 2011, 2012

# Spiritual preparation

## The meaning of membership

In his ministry to Yearly Meeting in 2012, Geoffrey Durham gave his personal reflection on what being a Quaker means to him. It isn't just about being a member or how we become members, but is about the spiritual journey, the discipline, testimonies, openness and belief, about how we live our lives. For him, becoming a Quaker meant finding not just a spiritual cushion but a springboard.

In our meetings, do we talk to one another about our own spiritual journeys? Why are we Quakers?

In preparation for Yearly Meeting Gathering, Friends are invited to consider the following questions:

- How does your being a member or not a member affect your feeling of commitment and belonging to your Quaker meeting and to the broader Quaker community?
- If you are in membership, did something change for you, and in you, when you became a member? Did you feel different, more responsible, perhaps even transformed?
- What is the continuing spiritual effect of membership?

You can reflect on these questions individually, but it may help deepen your meeting and its witness to talk about these questions together.

It will also help the whole community of Friends in Britain to talk about these questions together. We have set up an online forum for Friends to share their responses, and there will be opportunities throughout the Gathering to continue the conversation.

Visit the forum at [www.quaker.org.uk/ymforum](http://www.quaker.org.uk/ymforum).

## Suggested reading

- Geoffrey Durham's prepared ministry for Yearly Meeting 2012: [www.quaker.org.uk/previous-yms](http://www.quaker.org.uk/previous-yms).
- *Who do we think we are? Young Friends' Commitment and Belonging*. Swarthmore Lecture 1998 by Young Friends General Meeting. Out of print but may be available in your local meeting's library.
- *Quaker faith & practice*, fifth edition, 11.01, 11.02, and 11.41.
- 'Being Quaker, doing Quaker', leaflet published by Quaker Life. Available from the Quaker Centre – email [quakercentre@quaker.org.uk](mailto:quakercentre@quaker.org.uk) or call 020 7663 1030.
- *Quaker identity and the heart of our faith*. Conference papers and study materials published by Quaker Life.
- *Journey into life: Inheriting the story of early Friends* (Swarthmore Lecture 2013). Gerald Hewitson. Quaker Books, 2013.



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## Living out our faith in the world

An essential part of being a Quaker is how we live out our testimonies. How our faith leads to witness in the world will be an important aspect of our Yearly Meeting. In a world where people are suffering from violence, social injustice and the abuse of power, what are we as Quakers led to do individually and collectively? As we draw together the threads of 'What it means to be a Quaker today', we will also begin in plenary session and in smaller groups to explore 'Living out our faith in the world'. The two are inseparable to us as Friends.

- What might the world look like if we *truly* lived out our testimonies?

### Suggested reading

*Quaker faith & practice*, fifth edition, 23.10.

*Holding faith: Creating peace in a violent world*. David Gee. Quaker Books, 2011.

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## World War I centenary

We plan to mark the centenary of the outbreak of World War I through an activity for all ages. There will be further opportunities to learn about the choices Quakers made in 1914, and current peacebuilding activity.

### Suggested reading

*Quaker faith & practice*, fifth edition, 24.05–24.09, especially 24.08.

*Witnessing for peace on the centenary of World War I: A resource pack for Quaker meetings*. Available from the Quaker Centre – email [quakercentre@quaker.org.uk](mailto:quakercentre@quaker.org.uk) or call 020 7663 1030.

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## Exercising our responsibility at Yearly Meeting

Spiritual preparation is also required for receiving the reports of our governance bodies. These will be available in June.

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## Other aspects of the Gathering

Most of this document is concerned with helping to prepare for the plenary aspects of the Gathering. There will also be a number of other activities throughout the week that aim to sustain and enrich us.

### Journeys

Over three afternoons Gatherers will have the opportunity to explore the theme of the gathering in a wide variety of smaller sessions and groups. 'Journey' sessions will be grouped according to topic or type of activity. Gatherers will be free to plan their own 'Journey'. Some may wish to concentrate on a particular topic or activity whilst others pick a variety.

### Options

A range of activities, including creative arts, will be offered in the mornings and in the evenings.

### Arts

Much of what happens at YMG will be beyond words. You might spend a quiet moment on a friendship bench, find spaces filled with silk hangings, or trees or street furniture transformed by radical 'yarnstormers'. You might browse an exhibition, share a poetry workshop or take part in a dance performance. Some activities will support inner reflection, others outward expression. Music, painting, knitting, dance, fine art or gardening can deepen our spiritual life.



# Yearly Meeting Gathering 2014: Outline programme (draft)

