**Quakers in Yorkshire**

**Group to Reinvigorate and Simplify Structures and Processes (GRASP)**

**Minutes of meeting held on 30 October 2019 at Carlton Hill Meeting House, Leeds**

**Present:** Alison Clarke (York), Steve Hallett (P&H), Jim Ledwidge (BWY), Tracey Martin (Leeds), David Olver (C&K & Convenor), Rosie Roberts (S&B)

**Prevented:** Richard Hawkes (Leeds Alternate), Barbara Windle (QiY Trustees)

**We began our meeting with worship.**

**1. Agenda**

We agree the agenda for today.

**2. Minutes**

The minutes of our meeting held on 25 September 2019 have been circulated.

**3. Members update on relevant matters which have happened since our last meeting.**

We heard from each of us on developments since we last met:

* David, Rosie and Tracey attended the residential Meeting for sufferings at Woodbrooke and had a number conversation with interested Friends.
* Rosie and David have talked about how to communicate with neighbouring Area Meetings and suggest using Meeting for sufferings Representatives. The time for this may be at the end of the year.
* David reported that London Quakers have set up a working group to explore the possibility of merging the 7 AM charities but retaining the AMs for spiritual and witness matters. This might use the London Quaker Property Trust as the chartable vehicle as it already owns all London Meeting Houses.
* Leeds AM has initiated a possible joint response from all QiY AMs to the BYM call for expressions of interest for local development workers and/or a local hub/cluster of staff.
* Jim and Steve talked of the need for a cultural shift among Friends if collaboration is to become real.
* Rosie reported on conversations with John Philips (Edinburgh meeting) on what Scottish Friends are doing towards simplification, including:
  + success with using remote communications to deal with the widely scattered meetings;
  + the challenge of finding enough Friends to fill all the roles;
  + the problems which might inhibit the merging of some functions in AMs;
  + All Scottish AMs are different and this makes considering collaboration challenging;
  + A benefit of smaller AMs is that trustees need to be trusted and this is much easier if they are available to meet Friends.
* Tracey reported on a day at Woodbrooke which brought together BYM and Woodbrooke staff involved in the Vibrancy project and explored potential for working closer together. There is a preference for using the term “Quaker-centred support”.
* Alison reported that York AM Trustees are exploring using paid support for the Burial Ground Committee and also to employ administrative support for Trustees and the AM officers.

We note that Jonathan Carmichael, Simpler Meetings Project Officer, is speaking at Quakers in Yorkshire on 18 January 2020. We agree that Tracey will act as link with the Simpler Meetings Project.

**4. What can we learn from the data on AM roles and membership statistics?**

**(a) AM roles**

Thanks to each of us for compiling the lists of roles in our Area meetings which have been collated into a single table and discussed here.

We have reviewed the roles and noted the relatively large number of separate trusts.

There ought to be opportunities to share roles across one or more AMs, such as Safeguarding coordinators, Registering officers etc. There is a consistency across all 7 AMs with many similar roles which also suggests opportunities for sharing roles.

We need to build on trust and commitment. We might offer a model for AMs and LMs to consider how to share roles.

We need to be aware of positive energy which comes at the LM level from ownership and engagement. However, this should not stop us from offering radical solutions.

**(b) Membership statistics**

We have received data on the trends in numbers of members and attenders and children from the Books of Members for 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018.

We have reviewed the picture that emerges of trends in members, attenders and children. We note the relatively small number of large meetings and the long tail of smaller meetings. The changes over 9 years shows a slow decline with a few meetings showing growth.

We have speculated on the impact of owning meeting houses and the consequences of current discussions in the Yearly Meeting of the consequences of the climate crisis.

**5. Re-invigorating Yorkshire Quakerism**

We agree that there are two strands to our work: (1) Ideas as to how to reinvigorate Yorkshire Quakerism and (2) ideas as to how to simplify meetings. Although there are important links between the two strands.

We have considered whether more attention should be given to the process of developing membership as a potential way of reinvigorating Quakerism. Friends go from being enquirers to attenders to members as a continuum. But we often do not think about how we develop attenders so that they are ready to become members. After the formal process of becoming a member, there is a need to provide continuing support for spiritual growth.

We have discussed the importance of building community, the means of which may be different in different meetings. But in all cases we need to do so with positive joy. We are mindful of the power of well worded question to encourage all of us to start thinking about these issues.

**6. Simplification**

We will return to ways of simplifying practices at our next meeting.

**7. Date of next meeting**

Saturday 30 November, Carlton Hill MH, 10.30 to 13.00

David Olver

30 October 2019