

Meeting for Sufferings: report to Devon AM of the meeting on 5 September 2013

Points raised leading to possible action by Friends and Meetings are in italics below. Links are in blue.

Quaker Faith & Practice: My last report, following the July meeting of MfS, included the news all the MfS representatives were invited, “ to bring ... to the next meeting of MfS ... on Saturday 6 October, one or more young people from (their) Area Meeting ... for a young people’s consultation on Quaker Faith & Practice. Freddie Brasher of Plymouth Meeting answered the call! He came to London with his mother Jacqui, and I had lunch with him. I think he had an interesting day with about 35 others from all over the UK. I have seen no report of it, but those who didn’t come can answer questions on the [BYM website](#).

Statement on Syria: The public statement by Friends House was needed quickly, so was issued by the Recording Clerk and staff without all the consultation which would have made it impossible before 2011.

Palestine and Israel: This was again the first item, following the decision made at the April meeting to reconsider our position, Area Meetings having had six months to think about it. Six AMs sent in Minutes and Swarthmore AM (Cumbria) joined Devon AM’s discernment that all Israeli produce should be boycotted now. Other Minutes showed unease that we were not doing enough. However, most MfS reps were clear – only produce from West Bank settlements should be boycotted, so there is no change in policy. One worry was that a stronger stand might endanger Quaker work on EAPPI. As a result of Quaker discussions with the Board of Deputies of British Jews they are starting to take up cases of injustice involving children. *Friends are asked to write to Catherine Ashton, EU ‘Foreign Minister’, to ask that the EU should resist lobbyists who want to water down the new ban on EU financing of the unjust settlements.*

Government cuts: welfare reform: This subject has been on every MfS agenda this year, and there were five more minutes from AMs, but there is still no project behind which Friends at MfS feel they can unite – it was suggested by some that the universal strong feelings on this issue will result in a movement rather than a project. QPSW will bring a further report to MfS in December. *Some Friends are raising specific cases of hardship and the need for reform of taxation with their MPs.* A weekend conference at Woodbrooke, ‘Gathering for Action: Welfare Cuts and Inequality’ (25th – 27th October) will challenge the distorted use of statistics. Many AMs have called for a public statement on the issue, but because MfS feels a statement would be an inadequate response, none has been issued yet. *The Quaker survey on the issue is on the BYM website now at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-meetings-survey-actions-concerning-inequality-and-welfare-benefit-cuts> and all Friends are invited to add to it.*

Quaker Housing Trust: We were given the triennial report on the Trust’s valuable work, assisting many projects with small but vital donations or loans. *They have run down their funds considerably, and prayerful and financial support are both welcome, see also <http://www.qht.org.uk/> or ring 020 7663 1036.*

Funding the centrally-managed work: There will be no quota and the figure of £150 per member is not prescriptive. Donations are best when given joyfully, and experience shows that *requests for donations are most successful when knowledgeable Friends explain how the money will be used* [perhaps as part of Notices after MfW?]. The most generous contribution may not be the biggest..... We were reminded that all the work done centrally has been discerned in some way by us!

Divestment: fossil fuels: Trustees asked Meeting for Sufferings for advice on possible divestment from three fossil fuel companies in which BYM has shares, and after an initial wobble on the grounds that we should have a shareholder voice in them, the advice given was clear – divest! Trustees have since [decided](#), and Quakers have been praised by the environmental campaign group, Operation Noah, for being the first Christian denomination to divest from fossil fuel extraction. Google quakers fossil fuels.....

Other business: Minutes received from AMs were about exhibition space in Friends House, changes to the Probation Service, Drones, and Yearly Meeting 2014 agenda; and from the Minute 36 Group on work towards YM 2014. Finally, approval was given to the terms of reference for a Long Term Framework 2015-20 Working Group and a timetable for consultation from late 2013 to early 2014 and at YM 2014.

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