

Gloucestershire Area Quaker Meeting Job Description

Title: Area Meeting Representative to Meeting for Sufferings

General Context of the Role:

Meeting for Sufferings role changed in 2007. It is no longer the Trustee body responsible for the administration and financial affairs of Britain Yearly Meeting. This responsibility has been passed to BYM Trustees.

Meeting for Sufferings is now the standing representative body responsible for the vision and long term planning for the life of Britain yearly meeting. It is the link between central work and the local work of Quakers. It is responsible for all appointments, as nominated by Central Nominations Committee to the central committees, including the Trustees.

It is responsible to and reports to yearly meeting.

Currently at least two Representatives are nominated by each Area meeting; this is a supportive state of affairs, since Representatives can discuss their work before and after the Meeting, and no single Representative has to bear the entire responsibility of the task. Representatives serve normally for three years, the term of service normally begins at Yearly Meeting.

Experience and qualifications:

Because of the variety and weight of the business which comes before Meeting for Sufferings, Area Meeting Nominations Committees will look for Representatives who are spirituality mature, and ready to share responsibility for the work of the Meeting. Ideally, Representatives should be well versed in Friends' business methods, with a good grasp of Quaker testimonies and structures.

Main Responsibilities:

1. Regular attendance at Meeting for Sufferings
2. Appropriate preparation for the Meeting, including the linking of central and local concerns.
3. The preparation and delivery of a report to Area Meeting

...and What these things all mean in practice:

1. The Meetings take place at Friends' House in London (in Euston Road, just opposite Euston Station), six times a year, usually on the first Saturday of the month. They last from 10:00 (sometimes earlier) until 4:30 (sometimes later, depending of the business to be done). Meetings open and close with a period of worship. There is a lunch break of one hour. Lunch can be taken in the restaurant (excellent choice of dishes and very reasonable prices), or, if you prefer to bring sandwiches, in one of the committee rooms, where tea and coffee are available. Some members choose to use their lunch-hour to get some fresh air, and eat their sandwiches in Friend's House garden, or somewhere else. There is usually a short tea break.

Stamina is required, and the ability to concentrate. There is usually a good deal of business to be dealt with; the discussion of topics can be wide ranging although meetings are now often themed, such as "Quakers and the Environment" and linked to concerns expressed and prepared in Area meetings.

MFS sometimes divides into groups of approximately 20, called Home Groups, to discuss and clarify a particular agenda item. This is an excellent way of getting to know people and of making a personal contribution.

You may not often be called upon to contribute verbally to the discussion, but our Quaker discipline assumes a ministry of silent waiting on the Spirit, upholding the processes of the Meeting.

Meeting for Sufferings has developed a Support group of more experienced members, who are available to clarify the work and procedures, and give such other support as may be useful to new members – so don't be deterred by the apparent difficulty of all the above. Currently, 2008, Bill Rowland of Cheltenham Meeting is a member of the Support Group. A recent innovation has been the development of an Induction Weekend, so it is easier to make friends from the beginning, and to learn quickly how Sufferings works.

2. At least a week before each Meeting for Sufferings takes place, papers relating to most of the Agenda items are circulated to Representatives, so that they may have time to study the material and familiarise themselves with the issues, and can arrive with some understanding of the work ahead of them. Typically, these papers are extensive, detailed, and often quite complex (but very well ordered). Time needs to be set aside for their consideration.

3. An important part of the role of Representative to Meeting for Sufferings is reporting back to the Area Meeting afterwards. This, too, requires careful preparation: a brief accurate account of Meeting for Sufferings business is needed, but it is also important to give some personal sense of your experience of the occasion, and of the life and feeling of the Meeting, so that Area Meeting is able to relate positively to the central work of the Society. You will need to make sure that there is a place on Area Meeting agenda for your report. It need not be a long report, but it should be a faithful one. Only one representative is needed to report in this way each month, though sometimes Representatives may wish to share the task. "The Friend" always has a useful summary and MFS minutes are available via e-mail on the Quaker website the week after the meeting.

The Rewards:

Representing Area Meeting at Meeting for Sufferings offers wonderful opportunities: to learn more about how Britain Yearly Meeting really ticks, and how the necessary work of the Society takes place; to meet new Friends from all over the country; and, - perhaps most important of all – to feel part of the processes of spiritual discernment and decision-making of a highly committed and experienced group of friends.

Travel expenses are paid by Area Meeting and essential over night expenses reimbursed.

Colin Gerard
10.2.2008

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