

## Report on Meeting for Sufferings (MfS), Friends House, London, 1st October 2016

*QFP 24.53 It should be the goal of understanding to pierce first through the thin layer of superficial familiarity and then through the hard rock of differing customs, habits and beliefs to discover the real humanity that lies beneath. National, racial and religious differences have not destroyed our common humanity, but they have given it different faces which may tempt us to forget that all the things that really matter, life and death, birth and love, joy and sorrow, poetry and prayer, are common to us all. The sense of our common humanity is latent within us, but only occasionally do we appreciate it as a living reality, as when at times of great stress we are upheld by strangers of an alien creed and tongue. Then the inward eye is opened and we see humanity standing above all nations, more humble, more patient and far more enduring than all the kingdoms of this earth. This is the ultimate justification for our peace-making.*

From time to time the business of MfS is more about receiving reports than focusing on discernment. This was such a meeting. We received reports on:

1 The Vibrancy in Meetings programme. As a pilot project this only covers parts of our Yearly Meeting: East Anglia is not yet covered. The appointed local development workers will be using *Our Faith in the Future (FIF)* as a resource for working with local Friends.

2 The recent visit to the USA by the Recording Clerk & Yearly Meeting Clerk, Paul Parker and Deborah Rowlands. They shared their reflections on their visit to Philadelphia and Baltimore Yearly Meetings, and other Quaker groups based in the East of the US. This included details on some of the concerns held within these meetings:

- on racism, both within the wider society but also looking at inclusiveness and diversity within their Yearly Meetings.
- the involvement of young adult Friends at all levels of the Yearly Meetings - finding fresh ways for them to be heard and to take a proper part in the business.
- meetings that are running out of capacity. Some are experimenting with different business and clerking styles. For example, instead of fixed committees they use "collaborative sprints" - that we'd probably call "job and finish"; active talent spotting; and upholding active Friends through care support teams

What has emerged is that there are many areas of commonality where we can learn from each other and share experiences - and an opportunity of us to export what we do well too. We can look forward to more interaction.

3 The work of Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee. Currently, it is overseeing some 300 separate projects at home and abroad, across all of our testimonies. There is a general recognition it can't do everything so it is looking to see how best to prioritise what it does, to give Quaker work greatest impact. It is finalising an overall strategy, developed in the context of FIF, which we can expect to hear a lot more about at Yearly Meeting 2017. This is likely to involve more partnership working with AMs/LMs and ways in which we can work more with other non Quaker groups (*Quakers work collaboratively; Quakers are well known and widely understood*).

Forced migration remains a major concern. A new programme manager is soon to be appointed to cover the subject. Inter alia, he/she will explore what kind of work Quakers can do best as well as build relationships with other bodies. There will be more about this at the Woodbrooke conference on the subject early next year.

As usual, a full report of the meeting and papers can be found on the dedicated pages of the Quaker.org website

Robert Parkes, November 2016