

A framework for action 2009–2014

Together in worship
and witness





The Religious Society of Friends values its roots and traditions.

One of its most radical traditions is to explore the world, as it changes, in the light of the evolving testimony of Friends.

The roots of the Friends' witness are in the openings that the Spirit offers each of us and what we reach together. The vitality of our spiritual life must be replenished in Friendship and worship.

We seek to nurture and challenge that of God within, individually and together. If we are open to God, we can be open to that of God in everyone and so our work may bear witness to God in love, truth and hope.

Annique Seddon, December 2007

www.quaker.org.uk

Introduction

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain is a small church with a radical history, expressing a faith through worship and action. This document, from Meeting for Sufferings, the standing representative body of Quakers in Britain, provides a framework to guide and unite Quakers in Britain and their central organisation, Britain Yearly Meeting, in their life and work at every level. It provides the basis for allocating resources over the years 2009–2014, though much of the work may extend beyond that time boundary. It builds on the complex lives and experience of Quakers over 350 years, drawing on our Christian roots. It reflects in particular our testimonies to truth and integrity, equality, peace and simplicity.

The framework is a strategic focus for activity, not a straitjacket; it outlaws nothing but it provides a focus for work for and of Friends across Britain and an opportunity to achieve a more visible and effective witness for our faith.

We hope that Friends everywhere will take to heart the words heard in Meeting for Sufferings in February 2008 that we need “kindlers not snuffers: more pro-action, less institutional thwarting.”

Only when we go forward in discomfort can we hope to find our feet in a troubled world.

Margaret Amor in Meeting for Sufferings, 5 April 2008



Principles

Certain principles underlie this framework:

- It is for all Friends in Britain.
- All the work must be led by the Spirit and arise from tested concerns. These concerns may be long-established or new.
- The framework provides a clear guide as to the priorities for the use of resources, taking account of our size and capacity, but also allowing flexibility to respond to change.
- Friends at all levels need to respect the work of other bodies, throughout Britain and internationally, whether or not Quaker, work with them, learn from them and avoid ineffective duplication of their work.

Mode of working

The mode of Friends' working throughout Britain requires a change of mindset and some new competences to make us fit for purpose. We have heard that Friends hope for a clear emphasis on:

- more working together as meetings and linking up in new ways
- having a central body that is about empowering and supporting, serving Friends by bringing together those active in a field rather than drawing them into central work

This kind of working is already happening in small ways but we would like to see it go much further. We would like all those engaging in serving Britain Yearly Meeting, whether as committee members or staff, to:

- i. foster ideas and inspiration – exploring, testing and challenging ideas and good practices coming from individuals and meetings and sharing them widely;
- ii. be gatherers and researchers of information, networking and supporting networks to take action, acting as a hub for information and exchange and taking full advantage of new technology;
- iii. hold knowledge on who, whether or not Quaker, has experience in a given field and pull together the experts into an advisory team;
- iv. be a forum for debate, with Quakers and others, to build knowledge and courage;
- v. express a Quaker voice and act as advocates on national issues, knowing how to gain access and facilitating that access;

- vi. provide up-to-date materials, training, advice and information, including up-to-date lists of Quaker work around the country, working with Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre as our lead training partner, and not duplicating its work;
- vii. give meetings advice and information about their legal and stewardship responsibilities and good governance practice;
- viii. coordinate and manage projects where a central focus is needed, for example on international work;
- ix. work more closely with Quakers in other countries, the Quaker Council for European Affairs, Quaker United Nations Office and, as appropriate, other churches and faiths, drawing on the knowledge, understanding and advice of our committees;
- x. assess projects and distribute funds to meetings and other bodies.

These roles will call for developed skills, for example in advocacy, networking and facilitation. They will also mean a change in culture and a time of adjustment before a new mode of working is established.

There is something special, something wonderful at the heart of Quakerism and if that is to survive and grow, bureaucracy and busyness must not smother it.

Eleanor Coss, Consultation report, March 2008

We would like to explore partnership arrangements where the lead in some areas of work need not be taken by staff at Friends House but by meetings and other Quaker bodies. They may need funding. That may come from a variety of sources, including from central funds. We would like Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees to think imaginatively about how work is taken forward in a variety of partnerships. An important role for Trustees will be to devise ways of testing value for money.

Friends seek God's help in choosing what they are uniquely suited to do, in a world which is so full of needs that we cannot respond to all of them.

Response from two individual Friends from Sheffield and Balby Area Meeting

The priorities for Quakers in Britain for 2009–2014

Strengthening the spiritual roots in our meetings and in ourselves



Speaking out in the world

Peace



Sustainability



Strengthening local communities

Crime, community and justice



Using our resources well

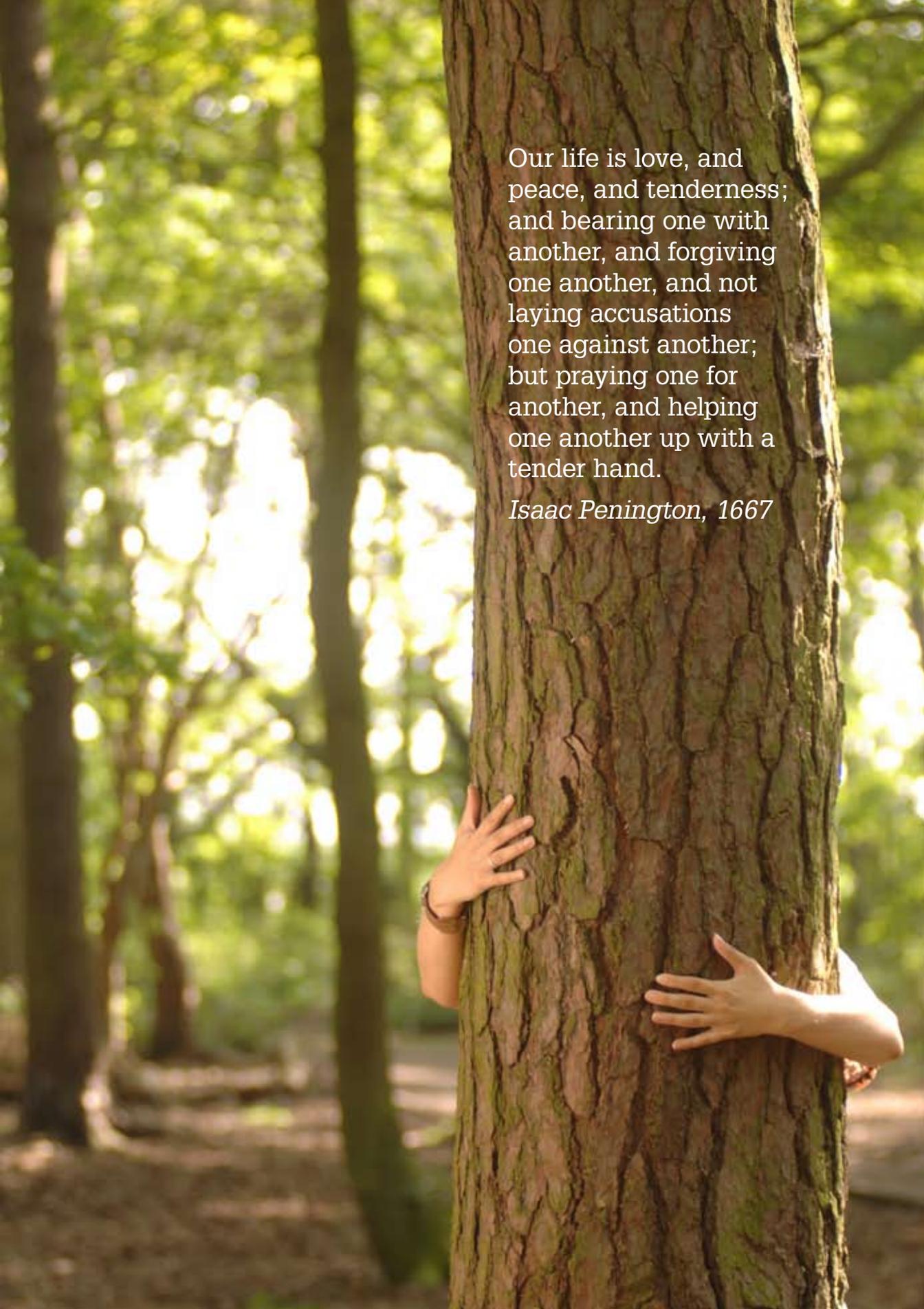
a. Strengthening the spiritual roots in our meetings and in ourselves

We wish to see all our meetings being inclusive worshipping communities, where everyone is welcomed and valued. We all need to:

- i. develop the common spiritual base from which action can spring, learning from those who went before, bringing together our prayer life and our practical life and strengthening our ability to express our faith and hear that of others;
- ii. inspire our weaker meetings, encourage leadership and a teaching ministry;
- iii. integrate and value the contribution of young people in all-age worship, in sharing our faith and in learning and listening;
- iv. care for each other;
- v. welcome and nurture those exploring Quakerism, showing them how membership can be an adventurous opportunity;
- vi. work in partnership between meetings and amongst Quaker bodies.

This is a challenge for every part of the Quaker community – individual Friends in our various worshipping or working groups, those staff and committees who provide support from Friends House, those who give training and education, in particular Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, and those who write and speak about their faith and values.

Without this none of the other priorities has integrity.

A photograph of a person hugging a large tree trunk in a sunlit forest. The person's hands are visible, resting on the bark. The background is filled with green foliage and sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a warm and peaceful atmosphere.

Our life is love, and
peace, and tenderness;
and bearing one with
another, and forgiving
one another, and not
laying accusations
one against another;
but praying one for
another, and helping
one another up with a
tender hand.

Isaac Penington, 1667

Are Friends ready once again to be the
radical voice they once were?

Consultation report



b. Speaking out in the world

We wish the renewed emphasis on speaking our truth and on outreach work, which has been stimulated by Quaker Quest and Quaker Life, to continue locally and nationally, grounded in stronger spiritual roots in our meetings and members.

We wish to see meetings and individuals confidently expressing their Quaker faith and values wherever opportunities arise, whether by talking in the bus queue, by their example as neighbours or work colleagues, by taking up issues with the media or by uniting with others.

We hope that at both local and national level Quakers in Britain will be bolder in using the media. We look to Quaker Communications Department and Quaker Life, as well as others with experience, to help members and meetings to make our faith known more widely.

c. Peace

We are a peace church with a particular history and authority borne by 350 years of upholding our peace testimony. We endorse wholeheartedly the work that Quaker Peace & Social Witness has done on peace education, alternatives to violence, and in pre- and post-conflict situations. We would like the same resource to continue to be devoted to peace work and hope Trustees will look to Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee to advise on the programmes that will be most effective.





d. Sustainability

Sustainability is an urgent matter for our Quaker witness. It is rooted in Quaker testimony and must be integral to all we do corporately and individually. Quakers have particular gifts to offer the world in living our values, in our approach to community and in our way of working, which encourages everyone's voice to be heard.

We are called to be patterns and examples, taking responsibility for our individual and corporate environmental impacts, and engaging in local, national and international politics. We need to develop connectedness in our witness, sharing experiences, gifts and burdens between Quakers locally and centrally, and with non-Quakers.

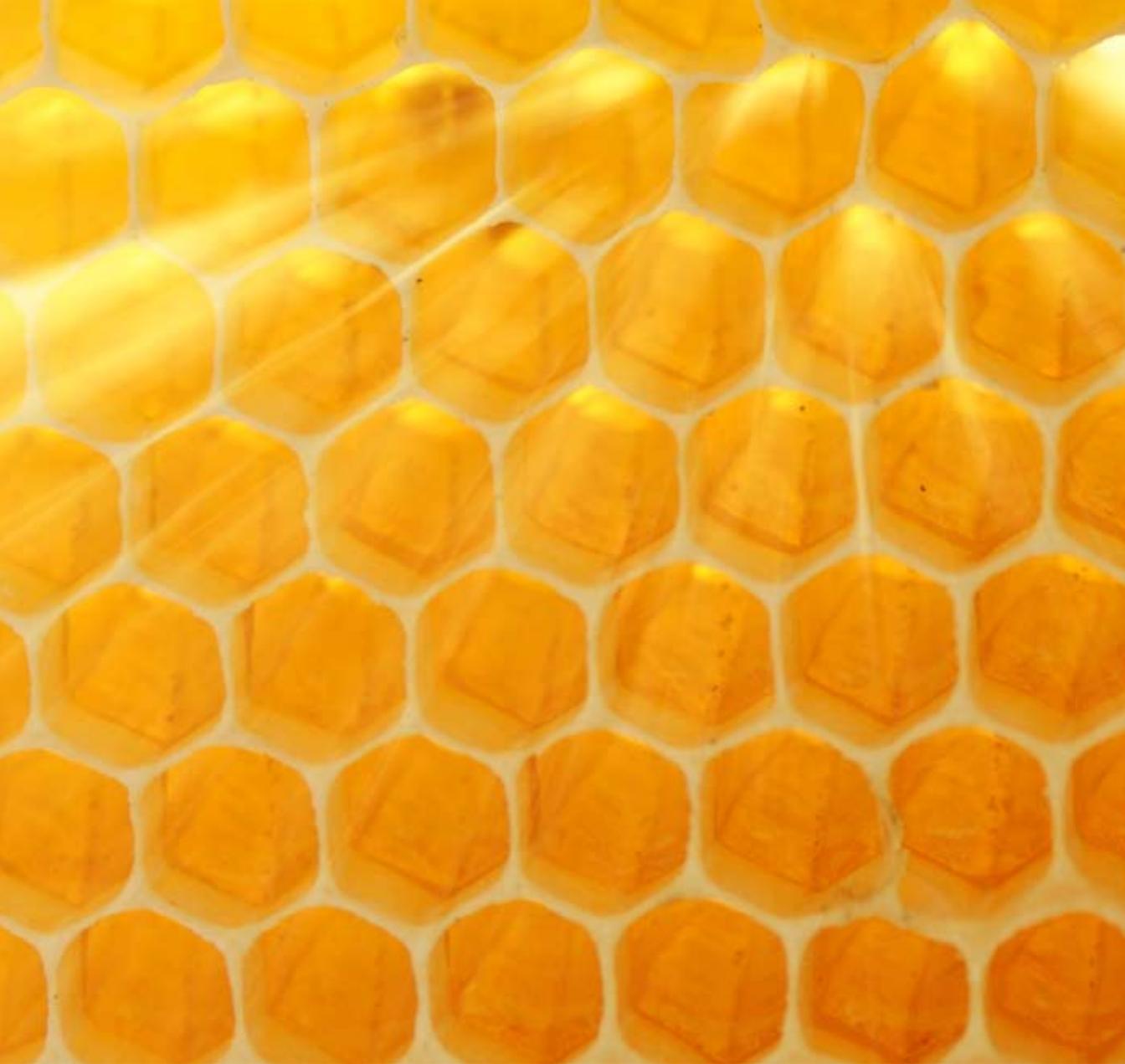
We ask all meetings and all members and attenders to work together, led by projects such as Living Witness, to live simpler lives that help to conserve our environment and enable all forms of life to flourish.

e. Strengthening local communities

From the strength of our worshipping groups Quakers should be able to move confidently into working for cohesion in their local communities. We live in a society under pressure, in which certain groups are marginalised, others fearful, the cohesion of communities disturbed by rapid change. Quakers have been active throughout our history in caring for those who are disadvantaged or dislodged from their family roots. We expect all this work to continue.

One of the major challenges of this time is the impact of global migration. The pressures on people to move to Britain, legally or not, are not likely to ease. We wish to see Quakers embracing this diversity as a gift not a problem. We wish to support the receiving communities, often themselves under strain, and to encourage local Quakers to welcome and nurture those who arrive here, to meet that of God in them and to enable them to live fulfilling lives. This includes all who arrive facing uncertainty, isolation, separation from family, loss of familiar ways of living and perhaps poverty. They may be asylum seekers and subsequently refugees, workers, slaves or undocumented immigrants. We would like to see central and local work devoted to advocating on their behalf, working with other bodies.

Quakers are well placed to play a particular role in fostering interfaith understanding and closer relations between the faith communities, culturally and in friendship. This is mainly local work, but there are benefits from sharing experience.



To this day Friends everywhere disdain pressing their faith on others, preferring them to be led by the Spirit. But Quakers are not shy about appealing to the conscience of society and demonstrating by example that they are, like their forebears, Friends of the Truth.

David Yount, American Friend, writing in *The Friend*,
2 November 2007, page 14.



f. Crime, community and justice

Quakers are well known for our work in supporting prisoners and in campaigning for reform of our justice system. Quaker work includes promoting alternatives to violence, alternatives to custody, restorative justice and support for the families of prisoners and for communities affected by crime.

We would like work to be funded in niche areas that can best draw on our existing local experience, such as that of our Prison Ministers, to complement the work already carried out by other bodies such as the Prison Reform Trust and the Howard League for Penal Reform. We hope in particular that work can address the needs of mentally ill people within the justice system.

We would like to see this area exemplify ways in which central, local and individual effort and experience can be brought together in a campaign over a long time to influence public opinion to transform the criminal justice system. This must be based on evidence, working with established campaigning bodies. The basis for this work is our belief in that of God in everyone, and our testimonies to equality and peace.

g. Using our resources well

We need to be good stewards of all the resources in our care – people, reserves and investments, IT, buildings – putting our assets to work in the world, not sitting on them. For example, we may not need to spend so much resource on committee and group meetings at the centre. Now that our new governance arrangements have settled, it may be the time to simplify more, to question why we are meeting; why that committee is needed; why we are choosing to spend time on this rather than that. We need to make sure we are using our structures with integrity.

We wish Britain Yearly Meeting and all Quaker meetings in Britain to seek to be exemplary employers. We have a special opportunity to show how the testimony to equality affects our employment policies and practices, for example by maintaining the low ratio between the earnings of the highest and lowest paid employees and by providing training and development opportunities to all employees who can benefit from them.

We have many buildings that are not fully used and others – notably Friends House – where the cost of remaining can only be justified by increased use by non-Quaker organisations. To achieve this, buildings need to be upgraded, which will require capital up front. We should not baulk at that where income projections justify the spend. This is a vital part of stewardship.

Minimising the adverse environmental impact of our buildings is also a vital part of stewardship.

In most areas there are meetings struggling to maintain their buildings and to muster the mental effort to get work done effectively. Other meetings have able members and substantial unspent reserves. George Fox enjoined us to help one another: we would like to see stronger meetings doing more to help the weaker.

We would like those meetings that have reserves not required for immediate foreseen needs to find ways of putting these resources to good use.



Flexibility

We are clear that the matters set out above should be the priorities for Quakers in Britain for the coming six years and probably much beyond. But we cannot predict whether we shall be led to another concern and there must be flexibility in our plans to allow for that. One example might be the possibility of meetings taking on work with children and young people in their community. We must also value the caring work already being undertaken by local meetings with people with specific needs. Equally there must be discipline and at times the re-testing of concerns. We are often described as a small organisation punching above our weight and our impact will be diminished if we leave one piece of work unfinished to start another.

Assessing progress

Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees are responsible for ensuring this framework is implemented so far as the centrally managed work is concerned. We look to the Trustees in each operational plan to show how the framework will be carried forward in new programmes.

We also ask area meetings to inform Meeting for Sufferings about how they are engaging with the framework and with each other – their activities, their ways of working and their partnerships.

We would also like to receive from Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, after the first three years of the framework, a more formal assessment based on these area meeting reports. We ask for that assessment to be funded and planned in good time.

Susan Seymour
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings
6 September 2008

Appendix

Criteria for assessing a proposed project

Quaker Faith & Practice describes the testing of a concern. The following criteria are offered to guide meetings when they are considering a particular project or use of resources; the criteria are always subordinate to the essential question of whether we are led to do the work:

1. Is it rooted in our Quaker history or current Quaker experience or does it arise from a tested concern?
2. Has it been properly researched? Are the proposed outputs and outcomes achievable?
3. Can it be adequately supported financially, and with sufficient personal commitment?
4. Are Quakers especially suited to carry it forward? Are others already doing it adequately?
5. Has partnership been fully considered? Are any proposed partners the most suitable?
6. Has its impact on the environment been fully considered and, if potentially adverse, mitigated?
7. Will it provide experience or information that will better enable Quakers and others to speak out?
8. Should it be supported because it would offer a new experimental approach that other organisations are reluctant or unable to try?

And how will we know when we have achieved
what we set out to do?

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness and self-control.*

Galatians 5:22–23



This document was agreed by Meeting for Sufferings
on 6 September 2008.

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