

## **Sufferings - Main Highlights from April meeting 2021**

As has been noted in reports on the life of local meetings, so Sufferings, as all other meetings, has had to adapt to life on-line.

One of the main detractors to this form of meeting, has been the difficulty to re-create the essential social aspects.

Over time we have learned to master breakout rooms for paired or group sharing, and now we can steer ourselves from room to room, with an "Open Space" function, but it is not the same, nor is the amount of time we can cope with on line

Sufferings has therefore adapted, by offering an evening preparation session, to give ample time and space for deeper reflection on a key issue, for discernment-at the main meeting; this Saturday this was on Assisted Dying. (But more of that later).

A minimum of reports from Central Committees this time, allowed for a much more roomy meeting which felt much better.

After routine business, the main items were the Trustees report, firstly on the commitment of BYM to become an actively anti-racist church, which Trustees sees as three-fold: to be an anti-racist employer, to build anti-racism into the design of work programmes; and to support Quaker meetings and communities on anti-racism work.

As we know, this is an issue Friends have been grappling with for some time, and it will be a key issue at the YMG this summer.

It was, however, brought sharply into focus, recently, when two former employees, made complaints ,on social media, about racism at Friends House. This was on top of a discussion, first started last year at a MFS, about whether to re-name the William Penn room at Friends house, in light of the revelations that he owned slaves. This decision has now been taken, but was still contested by one or two Friends at the meeting.

I was reassured to hear how the employees complaints had been handled by an external organisation and the no disciplinary action was required, and that Trustees are looking carefully at policies and procedures. As Paul Parker has said.

"We need to unlearn and dismantle the prejudice we are taught as we grow up in a culture which has racism embedded within it. Learning and unlearning on deep cultural issues can be a long process but we see this as an important step."

We also heard how BYM had responded to the Sewell Report for the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, by rejecting the findings of the report. Evidence they submitted had been disregarded.

I hope that we in West Somerset, will re-double our efforts to inform ourselves, of the lived experience of our brothers and sisters of colour, to challenge white privilege, and learn how to be an active ally. I hope we can form a working group to bring forward suggestions of how we might best do this. I believe we have started by already having renamed, or are considering how we might re-name Overseers.

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The other main issue was how to strengthen the relationship between YM Trustees and AM trustees, which I am sure we would all welcome.

Local Trustees and Friends are encouraged to attend one of the workshops which Trustees are offering, as a mutual listening exercise, so that the eventual MoU, which is the hoped for outcome, is grown rather than imposed, in an unhurried and thoughtful manner.

This is, of course, all part of the overall Trustees vision of “A simple Church governed by a simple charity”.

The dates for these sessions are 28 April at 1.30pm, 30 April at 6.30pm, 8 May at 11.00am, 14 May at 8.30am and 26 May at 6:30pm. They all follow the same format and will last 90 minutes. Please follow this link to register for one of these sessions if you wish  
<https://forms.quaker.org.uk/simplifyinggovernance/>

Further details and a link will be emailed to all those that register a week before each session.

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