



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of
Friends in Britain

Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting held at Friends House, London on 24 – 27 May 2013

To all Friends everywhere,

We send you our loving greetings as we come to the end of our Yearly Meeting. We have gathered as a community of Friends of all ages, in worship, reflection, and relaxation. In our opening session, we were inspired by responses from Friends throughout Britain to queries about discernment; we now write to Friends throughout the world to share our explorations.

“Trust me, I’m a Quaker” was the title of the young people’s programme, and this phrase has challenged us all. Some years into major changes in the organisation of our Yearly Meeting, we have reflected on our Quaker decision-making processes. Discernment is a discipline; it requires time, effort, trust, and practice. To engage in it fully, we need to let go of our own notions and preconceptions and pray with humility, “not my will but thine be done”. In a culture that values speed, our Quaker methods may seem slow, but they enable us to listen to and follow the guidance of the Spirit. Do we exercise enough patience and resist our desire for easy answers? Patient listening eventually leads to a feeling of rightness as a decision is reached; bringing our uncertainties into the presence of God is part of the search for truth.

Trusteeship is an important and evolving form of service within our Religious Society in Britain. Being a trustee and working with the structures of trusteeship is often challenging. We have heard, and held tenderly, stories from Friends who have direct experience of this work. We are all entrusted with gifts and with different aspects of the Society’s life and witness. How can we best support one another in using our gifts for the good of all? How can we recognise and empower each other’s service? Together, how can we help to heal our fractured world?

Our processes are precious but also fragile, vulnerable and risky. They take time, they can cause discomfort, and they can frustrate us. We sometimes make decisions without fully knowing where they will take us. Sometimes we get things wrong, and

Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

Telephone 020 7663 1000 Fax 020 7663 1001

Internet www.quaker.org.uk Email enquiries@quaker.org.uk

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we must be willing to learn from our mistakes. Our struggles with discernment may not easily be resolved, but these very struggles can bring us blessings. We need not be afraid of confronting issues where the way forward is not clear or where Friends are not in unity. We trust in that Spirit which guides us into all Truth. Thomas Kelly describes this trust as “walking with a smile into the dark”.

In large and small groups, and in our personal encounters with other Friends, we need to practise deep listening to one another and to the promptings of love and truth. Being open about our decisions, and being prepared to talk about them, makes it easier for those physically absent from our meetings for business to trust that we have been led by the Spirit.

In the Swarthmore Lecture, Gerald Hewitson told the story of his personal journey, which took him from the barren landscape of his childhood to finding God’s love and acceptance. This was the spiritually transforming experience of the early Quakers. In our business method and in our discernment, Friends are together on a pilgrimage of hope. We continue to follow our Inward Teacher, sometimes falteringly, sometimes confidently, but always in company with those who have travelled this way before us and those who are journeying with us now. As we go, we learn to see ourselves and our world through God's eyes, the eyes of love.

Signed in and on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Skidmore". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chris Skidmore
Clerk