

Meeting for Sufferings, 1 July 2023

Sufferings met in an open session, online and in person at Friends House as a continuation of the extra session of Yearly Meeting.

Various administrative tasks, including the registration of new Quaker Recognised Bodies, were disposed of quickly by draft minute.

Sufferings considered in depth two complex concerns.

The "Loyal Address" to Charles Mountbatten-Windsor, styled King Charles III.

Sufferings received a minute from Young Friends General Meeting regarding the "Loyal Address" made by representatives of the Society on 9 March 2023. During ministry a young Friend who had been part of that discernment ministered powerfully about young Friends reluctance to engage with the address at all, believing that making a "loyal address" puts us on the same side of many divides in society as the Livery Companies of the City of London, the Bank of England, and other bodies belonging to an older order. Young Friends had noted that groups such as XR, BLM, and similar groups are not entitled to make such addresses.

Some older Friends spoke on both their personal experience of the work (public and private) done by Charles Mountbatten-Windsor that has been aligned with Quaker values and also their reluctance to sign up to be "loyal" to the monarchy. Friends spoke of the long and difficult history of Christianity being aligned with empire.

Moving beyond the question of whether to make such an address and on to the mechanics of doing so, Friends wondered how it had ended up being a surprise to the Society that this invitation was on its way. The short time scale did not allow for proper discernment. The Society's central bodies will aim to do better for the next invitation (or opportunity), which surely won't be that long coming. A Friend suggested that next time we could best make our point by politely declining to be involved.

Ecocide

Sufferings received minutes from several Area Meetings indicating a desire for the Society to align with and support calls for "Ecocide" to be included in an amendment to the Rome Statute of the ICC as a crime against peace and humanity. Ecocide being an "unlawful or wanton act committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused"

Friends wondered what reasons there would be to believe that this would even work. They also wondered whether the Court is itself a body compatible with Quaker principles.

Friends expressed surprise that we seem to keep finding reasons to put off supporting this measure, and wondered why.

Sufferings asked QPSWCC to address this matter. They didn't send a minute in answer, they sent folks to present prepared ministry and take questions. This was done in a spirit of openness and listening and an attempt to improve communication from that central body back to Friends at large, as represented in this case by Sufferings. QPSWCC took the care and time that they thought the passion that the AMs deserved. No one disagreed that we need to act on climate change, but it requires deep discernment to find whether this is the right thing to do.

Materials will be coming to AMs regarding this matter for further consideration.

The Meeting closed with a sense that holding it open to those who had been at the YM session had been successful.

Keith Braithwaite