

Quakers and gender diversity

Introduction

This statement by Quaker Life Central Committee has emerged as a response to the shared experiences of Friends throughout Britain Yearly Meeting and the sense that it is our responsibility to lead on this. We commit to this being the start of a discussion for the comfort and discomfort of all Friends, with a focus on listening to where the words come from and upholding one another.

We accept that this is where we are now. There is much more to be done and more discussion to be had and this will be a process of careful thought and prayerfulness. We are aware of the pain and hardship around this topic and hold all Meetings in the Light and in our hearts during this exploration. It is essential to remember that we are Friends with each other and to treat ourselves and this sacred community with gentleness and love as we go forth.

An Initial Statement on Gender Diversity by Quaker Life Central Committee

We condemn all forms of bigotry, oppression and discrimination and seek to do all we can to remove such experiences from our Quaker community. Where this is not humanly possible we trust that, with Divine help, we can move forward together in making our Society a truly welcoming place for all. We affirm the right of all to explore their own expressions, non-conformity and identity in matters of gender and sexuality and note that this may involve clarity, decisiveness, doubt and re-thinking in any individual's life. We commit to providing places of worship and community that are welcoming of all on that journey. While we cannot hope to be perfect in attaining this, we seek to try what love can do.

We note, with sadness, that the current expression of gender diversity across our society has been coloured by bad feeling and hurtful language. We denounce such language and action. We exhort all Friends to consider their every word and deed carefully and lovingly and commit our organisation to work with tenderness to all as we work through this new social territory.

We affirm the right of women's organisations to critique and explore the nature of gender identification and respect their right to freedom of speech. We recognise that some Friends will find such organisations supportive and of comfort and respect their

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right to make their case. We do not accept that the critique of transgender identities in the political sphere is necessarily transphobic. We affirm our welcome to such organisations to meet publicly or privately on Quaker premises. We will work with all such organisations to address any potential uses of hurtful language.

We affirm the right of organisations that support transgender individuals, and all exploring their gender identity, to all such activities in pursuit of this, and respect their right to freedom of speech. We recognise that some Friends will find such organisations supportive and of comfort and respect their right to make their case. We affirm our welcome to such organisations to meet publicly or privately on Quaker premises. We will work with all such organisations to address any potential uses of hurtful language. As a Quaker community, we respect and uphold the self-expression of all members of and visitors to our community. We commit to using and respecting individuals' current names and pronouns.

In all our work with children and young people in our community, we respect and uphold their self-expressions and seek to offer them nurturing spaces in which to continue to grow and develop. We recognise that such self-expressions may change over time and that exploration of identity and conformity or otherwise to gender norms is a normal part of youth and may continue throughout life. We commit to offering our children and young people affirming activities and spaces which are not gender stereotyped and allow each individual freedom of self-expression that is appropriate for them at that time.

We note that shared spaces such as toilets, changing and sleeping areas can cause anxieties and concerns for people. We believe that no-one should have to use shared spaces which do not feel comfortable to them. In a context of systemic male violence, particularly towards women, we are especially minded to examine the potential adverse impact of any policy on women and girls and to make efforts to remedy this. All Quaker premises and events ought to provide facilities which everyone feels safe and comfortable using. The usage of these facilities must be clearly defined and communicated and must offer choice for the individual.

Throughout our history, Quakers have affirmed the equality of all before God. We profess that 'each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God' (Advices and Queries 22). We commit to continue our work in this matter, continually seeking new solutions to eradicate all forms of exclusion and to create safe space for all within Britain Yearly Meeting.

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What next?

We invite Friends to reflect and discuss the topic together. We also invite Friends across Britain to send personal stories and think-pieces to us – contributions will help us learn, and to consider whether to draw together some form of publication. Notes or minutes of discussions in Quaker communities could also be sent, as this will help us understand more about this exploration, and whether further resources might be helpful.

We're not inviting 'dots and commas' comments on the present text.

Please send any response, with your name, address, and the name of your Area Meeting (or other Quaker community) to us at gender@quaker.org.uk, or to Gender responses, Quaker Life, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. This email address will not be monitored regularly and we do not expect to enter into correspondence with those making submissions, but you will be contacted if we wish to publish any response you send.

Quaker Life Central Committee, November 2018