

The Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) In Ireland,
South Belfast Preparative Meeting

Trustee Annual Report for year ended
31st December 2023

South Belfast Preparative Meeting

Trustees (at 31st December 2023)

Brian Davis (Chair)

Sylvia Roberts

Will Haire

Contact Name & Address

Brian Davis

24 Moss Road

BT36 5JY

Charity number

NIC 107080

Bankers

Co-operative Bank (current account & deposit account)

Facebook page

South Belfast Quaker Meeting

@SouthBelfastQuakers

Website

www.southbelfastquakers.org

Trustees' Report for year ended 31st December 2023

Introduction

This report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and in line with the guidance produced by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Constitution and governance

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) In Ireland, South Belfast Preparative Meeting is governed by its governing document which was agreed by the Preparative Meeting on March 25th 2018. The Meeting was registered as a charity by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland on 17th May 2018.

The Trustees, of whom there should be not less than two, are appointed at the Annual General Meeting. They are appointed for a period of up to three years and are eligible for re-appointment for a further two terms. Trustees who served during the year ending 31st December 2023 were as follows:

Brian Davis (Chair of Trustees)
Sylvia Roberts
Will Haire

The Trustees are responsible for the policies, activities and assets of the charity. No Trustee received any remuneration for services as a member of the Board of Trustees and the charity has no employees.

There is in place a data protection policy and a child protection policy, both of which are reviewed annually.

Purposes of the charity

South Belfast Preparative Meeting is established by Lisburn Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland. It is primarily a Meeting for Worship that practises in accordance with the principles of the Religious Society of Friends, also known as Quakers.

We are based in a Meeting House at Marlborough Park North in Belfast. As well as the main meeting room where we meet for worship on a Sunday, we also have a kitchen and three smaller meeting rooms.

The purpose of our charity, as set out in our governing document, is the advancement of the general religious purposes of the Religious Society of Friends by the following means, in so far as they are exclusively charitable:

- i. Strengthening the Christian understanding and religious development of the Quaker meeting both in the geographical area of the Preparative Meeting and beyond;
- ii. Contributing financially and practically to the relief of suffering at home and abroad;

- iii. Providing for the pastoral care of individual Members and Attenders including assistance to those in need

Our activities during 2023

In 2023 we have enjoyed a full year both spiritually and socially as a meeting. We continue to meet each Sunday in a blended manner with a small number of Friends attending via zoom, due to location, health or other reasons.

The average attendance at Meeting for Worship on Sunday mornings is 38 adults and 8 children under 18 years.

We did not record any deaths of members in 2023. We have been heartened to see that 4 Friends who have been regular attenders at our meeting have been accepted into membership this year while we have celebrated the marriage of 3 of our members.

Our "After Meeting Conversations" which generally take place on the 3rd Sunday of each month, have continued to be a useful tool for considering Quaker concerns, the Testimonies and the spiritual life and business needs of the meeting. This year we held 7 sessions on Our Advices & Queries, Quakers and Prison, Quakers in the Arts, Ecology, Ethical Economics and Integrity in Public Life. Our Worship Sharing Group where a passage or passages from scripture are considered and discussed also met monthly and was well attended.

Our spiritual life has been complemented by a wide range of social activity, developing our community of Quakers. In March we held a Quiz Night in the meeting house with a bring and share meal, which was well supported and enjoyed by those there. We also held an all age Meeting for Worship in March. This was led and organised by the young people of the meeting and was on the topic of The Life of Margaret Fell.

We have held fund raising breakfasts in support of those affected by the earthquake on the border of Syria and Turkey and those affected by the war in Ukraine. A small, informal get together between South Belfast Quakers and members of the South Belfast Bahai Group (who use our meeting house space regularly), was held and felt to be helpful and informative for those who attended.

In July we held a Summer Meeting House Picnic, with Friends bringing and sharing food in the Meeting House Garden after Meeting for Worship, while we held a social evening in September in aid of the fund to support Quakers to attend World Plenary Meeting in South Africa. We marked World Quaker Day 2023 on October 1st, by taking part in a virtual link up with two other preparative/local meetings: Cork and Hastings in England.

In November, we held our annual craft fair, jointly with Frederick Street Friends, to raise money for the work of Quaker Service and the renovation of Frederick Street.

In December we held an all-age Meeting for Worship when the young people, supported by several adults prepared for our Family Sunday, to celebrate Christmas.

Our Monthly Book Group has continued, offering an opportunity for regular exploration of spiritual, often Quaker, written materials.

Website and Technology

Our website and Facebook page continue to be a means of outreach for our worshipping community. We posted an advice/query each week on Facebook, along with promotional events such as the May Sale in aid of Quaker Service, the Christmas Craft Fair, and our in-house monthly book group.

In 2023, our audience on Facebook of 611 followers, came mainly from the UK (52%) followed by the USA (18%). Kenya, the Philippines, and India each have just over 3%.

We still offer the option of attending Meeting for Worship on Sunday morning via Zoom (a practice that originated during the Covid lockdown).

The continuing rollout of Churchbox.co.uk to assist with coordinating all the different roles for a Sunday morning finally extended to just about all the rotas in 2023 (door keeping rota is coming on board in 2024). These included the Tea/Coffee rota, Closing meeting rota, Advice & Queries rota, Flowers rota, Young Persons facilitation rota, and Tech rota.

Children and Young People

The Annual Child Safeguarding report has been completed by our 2 safeguarding Representatives and forwarded to Monthly Meeting.

An active programme of meetings have been arranged, and we have been delighted to see a number of our young people participate in Quaker activity in Ireland, in Yorkshire with the Yorkshire Summer School, and in Europe through EMES.

Eco-Quakers

Members of the Eco-Quaker Planning Group have continued to explore ways in which we can engage seriously and wisely with the climatic and ecological emergencies, giving tangible expression to our shared commitment to values such as simplicity, stewardship, equity and peace.

Much attention has been given to a 'learning and discerning journey' in relation to aspects of the food system. In March, we hosted, in partnership with Prof John Barry at Queen's University, a café-style conversation about food over food. This theme was taken up again in April – first in an online pre-IYM Special Interest Group session that focused on food waste and then in a seminar during the Yearly Meeting.

The Meeting's Sustainability Plan was reviewed during the year.

Finally, members of the Eco-Quaker Planning Group participated in two half-day gatherings of the Creation Care Network – one during June in Drumalis Retreat Centre, Larne; the other in the South Belfast Meeting House during September.

Premises and Garden

Several work parties were organised and the garden has been kept in a reasonably tidy state. A member of the meeting has taken over the raised bed and has planted fruit bushes and vegetables. The apple trees have been pruned. There is a considerable amount of garden rubbish to be cleared, consideration is being given to hiring a skip.

The entrance doors have been replaced by automatic opening aluminium coated doors using a push pad system, which makes entry to the Meeting House more accessible for wheelchair users. This work was overseen by Pad Lock Security.

New carpet was laid in the New Room.

Electrical testing was carried out, the gas boilers serviced and the fire alarm system and fire extinguishers checked.

Bookings and Use of the Meeting House

We continue to hire out the Meeting House to a range of local groups, which they can now book via the website. We are using Hallmaster software to keep track of bookings, invoices, payments and receipts.

Income from bookings has not recovered completely to the pre-pandemic level, but it has improved significantly, providing us with an income of £12,584 during 2023.

Support for Charities

During 2023, we made grants from our funds to various charities. We also held breakfast events in the Meeting House to raise money for the Turkey/Syria earthquake victims and for Ukrainian refugees (both of these were donations were routed through the Disasters Emergency Committee).

We also held a tea party to raise money for the RNLI for its work of rescuing refugees. We had a plant sale in the garden, as well as a social evening, to raise money for Quaker Service.

In total, grants and money raised at these events totalled £14,641.

In addition we had six special collections held after our Sunday Meeting for specific charities, which raised £1,754.

On the first Sunday of every month, we collect donations of groceries and toiletries for the local Storehouse foodbank.

Financial Overview

We ended 2023 with a balance of £16,506 in our current account, after paying our bills and making grants to the charities we support.

2023 saw further increases in utility prices, but these were compensated for by an energy support payment from the government of £600. Our largest expenditure was on building

improvements (£10,900), most of it being a new front door to replace the old one which was not very secure as well as unfriendly for wheelchair access.

Our income from hiring out the Meeting House went up, and we also received £7,483 from HMRC in respect of claiming Gift Aid for donations made to the Meeting in 2021 and 2022.

Our deposit account was boosted by a final payment of £31,874 from the estate of our late Friend Joan Huddleston, and now stands at £148,947.

Our investments with the NI Central Investment Fund for Charities recovered from the fall in share prices in the last quarter of 2022. The value of our investments with NICIFC rose to £126,415 at the end of this year.

Overall, we ended the year with healthy balances in our current and deposit accounts, as well as the value of investments we have with NICIFC. Financially, we are in a very good position for next year and beyond, as regards meeting our expenses and making generous grants to Quaker and Non-Quaker charities.

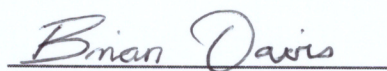
Looking Forward

All our activities need help to run and we are blessed with committed volunteers. Week after week Friends serve on coffee, door and flower rotas, organising Youth activities, attending to the premises and garden, convening and sitting on committees and serving the Meeting in a variety of ways.

Our Meeting continues to have a positive and open spirit.

Declaration

The report was approved by the Trustees, by email and phone consultation on October 13th 2024, and is signed below on behalf of the Trustees.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Brian Davis", is written over a horizontal line.

Brian Davis
Chair of Trustees