

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) In Ireland, Lisburn Monthly Meeting

Annual Report & Accounts for year ended 31st December 2024

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, Lisburn Monthly Meeting is governed by its governing document which was agreed by the Meeting on 20th August 2020. The Meeting was registered as a charity by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland on 15th February 2021.

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 2024 (and whose current terms end on 31st December 2025) were as follows:

Bronwen S M Haire

Martin K Mail

Philip A McDonagh (Clerk of Trustees)

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.

The Meeting has put in place a data protection policy and a safeguarding policy, based on guidelines from Ireland Yearly Meeting, which are reviewed regularly.

Purposes of the charity

Lisburn Monthly Meeting is a Meeting for Worship of the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland that practises in accordance with the principles of the Religious Society of Friends, also known as Quakers.

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 in the geographical area of responsibility of the Monthly Meeting;
- 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 of Preparative Meetings, including assistance to those in need.

At 31st December 2024 we had a total of 206 members as well as 124 regular Attenders.

Our activities during 2024

We are responsible for four Preparative Meetings in South Belfast, Frederick Street Belfast, Lisburn and Coleraine, one Recognised Meeting in Bishop Street, Derry and two Worship Groups in Fermanagh and Hillsborough. Monthly Meeting met on 5 occasions during the year with an average attendance of 24 members.

During the year, in addition to its normal business, Lisburn Monthly Meeting discussed two important policy documents, one provided guidance on visiting an applicant for membership and on reporting the visit; and the other, a burial ground policy relating to the two active burial grounds for which we are responsible, was agreed.

A special Ministry and Oversight training day was held at Lisburn Meeting House in May 2024. The training, entitled 'Ministry and Oversight in our Meetings', was well received by Friends across Ulster Quarterly Meeting and beyond, with 44 participating. It should be noted that a discussion has begun in 2025 on the appropriateness of the term 'Overseer' used by our Meetings for those responsible for pastoral care and other duties. This is also being considered by those responsible for reviewing 'Organisation & Christian Discipline' which sets out our advices and rules.

The 2024 Annual Reports from our Meetings very much reflect the polarities of the human condition – joy and grief, the inner spiritual life and communal worship, community life and living in the wider world.

We welcomed one Friend into membership and two Friends transferred membership from other Monthly Meetings. Three weddings of F/friends took place during 2024, at Belfast City Hall, and in London and County Kerry. Two Frederick St Friends moved away and are much missed. Sadly, there were many deaths during the year, all keenly felt by F/friends – we miss these wonderful people at our Meetings for Worship and feel for their grieving families and dear friends.

Our Preparative Meetings/Worship Groups are all uniquely different, face diverse challenges and deal with them in distinctive ways. Bishop St held a series of discussions on its Way Forward in 2023. As a result, how the Meeting is organised was changed to take account of its small number and the frailty of some members. These changes have worked well during the year. South Belfast Meeting has grown considerably in recent years – the challenge it faces is in maintaining a close, caring community and the administration burdens posed by a large Meeting. Social events, various interest groups and use of technology have helped to meet these challenges. Lisburn Meeting has been challenged by the increasing frailty of many of its members. This feature has impacted social events in particular. Adapting to circumstances, the regular meeting for coffee at a local, accessible garden centre, on the first Saturday of the month, continued this year and continues to prove popular. Coleraine Meeting is living proof that small is beautiful. The Meeting has used its small size to its advantage – it is fortunate in currently having what looks like the ideal demographic for fostering community-building – all its members deeply and actively committed to fostering both the spiritual and temporal life of the Meeting. Hillsborough Worship Group is challenged by the responsibility of caring for a listed building while ensuring that the Meeting House can continue to function as a Meeting House long into the future. The Hillsborough Committee has steered a successful course through the pressures of fund-raising and a planning application. Frederick St Meeting continues its response to the intensive inner-city redevelopment taking place in its neighbourhood and has successfully completed phase two of its refurbishment plan.

Meeting for Worship is central to the spiritual life of Friends. Lisburn, Bishop St and South Belfast Meetings continue to have blended Meetings, enabling F/friends to attend virtually. Frederick St is enjoying the recently refurbished Meeting Room which a visitor described as a "peaceful space". Spiritual life is also nourished in other ways – monthly Worship Sharing, Book Group and after Meeting conversations at South Belfast, a regular series of spiritual talks at Frederick St, a joint Frederick St and South Belfast 4-week Quaker Quest programme in February and March, the monthly prayer meeting attended by Friends from Lisburn, Lurgan and Bessbrook, monthly after-Meeting discussions and the regular emailing of an epistle from the Elder at Coleraine.

Social events and activities were many and varied. They are an important aspect of our Meetings, helping to foster a sense of community and feelings of belonging. Hillsborough had its annual coffee morning in December, two art exhibitions and a concert. Coleraine continue to have five shared meals during the year and had an extra one this year to celebrate World Quaker Day. South Belfast held a spring social potluck supper in aid of Quaker Service, picnics in June and July and a quiz night. Frederick St hosted breakfast for those attending the Belfast Hub of the FWCC World Plenary in August, their new audio-visual equipment appreciated by all. Their new kitchen was celebrated before Christmas when coffee and mince pies were enjoyed after Meeting. The “twinning” arrangement with Eustace St Meeting in Dublin which had stopped during the Covid pandemic was resumed. A group of 17 Frederick St Friends travelled to Dublin and were warmly welcomed by Eustace St Friends. It is hoped to reciprocate the hospitality in the coming year.

Engagement with our neighbours was very much a part of 2024.

Frederick St continues to hold a 30-minute Meeting for Worship on the first Wednesday of the month which is followed by refreshments. It is popular with visitors. Collaboration with Quaker Service on the development of the Frederick St Quaker Hub is ongoing. The upstairs classroom has been converted into modern offices that are now used by Quaker Service staff and a newly appointed Community Development Worker.

Lisburn has maintained its close connection with Friends School with the annual presentation of Bibles to school leavers at the Bible Sunday event in the school.

South Belfast Meeting House is regularly used by a wide variety of groups and is both a valuable form of outreach and a welcome source of income. The website and Facebook page also play a part in outreach with 832 followers on Facebook. Members of the Meeting have attended protest marches in support of peace in the Middle East, anti-racism and the climate emergency. The Quaker peace banner “that of God in everyone” has been carried on several marches.

Hillsborough Meeting House was, again, open as part of European Heritage Day in September.

Donations were made to a range of charities.

Coleraine continued its annual financial commitment to Quaker Service and Bishop St Meeting and supported Irish Quaker Faith in Action, Enniscorthy Meeting House Appeal, Frederick St Hub Appeal and Age NI Causeway.

South Belfast gave £12,500 in grants to Quaker and non-Quaker organisations during the year. In addition, five special collections were held raising £3,100 and two fundraising events resulted in a donation to Quaker Service of £3,973. One of the fundraisers was the annual craft fair which is a joint Frederick St/South Belfast venture.

We value the presence of children and young people in our Meetings.

Sunday School is on the first Sunday of the month in Lisburn. The usual attendance is 7 children. The children often bake buns which are then enjoyed by Friends with their after-Meeting coffee.

At South Belfast the young people meet fortnightly with 8 to 10 attending regularly. During the year they conducted a survey of Friends experience of Worship and provided feedback via an after-Meeting conversation. They attended camps and activities and represented IYM at BYM in July.

Looking forward

We look forward to God's continued blessing on our Meetings in 2025 and we hope to see growth in Christian understanding and spiritual experience in all our Meetings.

Public Benefit

The trustees of Lisburn Monthly Meeting are pleased to confirm that they have complied with their duty to have regard to the public benefit requirement statutory guidance of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Our public benefit has been demonstrated in a number of ways over the past year:

- We ensured that our Meetings hold regular Meetings for Worship, and these Meetings are open to members of the public as well as our own members and regular attenders – these Meetings provide spiritual nourishment and deepen the Christian experience and understanding of those who attend;
- Using legacy and bequest funds that have been left to the Meeting, we provide financial support to those in need within our Meetings and for other charitable causes;
- We open our two historic sites at Hillsborough and Frederick Street Belfast to the public on European Heritage Day.

Financial Review

The accounts for 2024 show a surplus of income over expenditure of £5,813.18 (2023: £26,304.96). As a result, our total current funds amounted to £63,178.11 by the end of the year (2023: £57,364.93),.

During the year legacy grants totalling £800 were made to Friends in need of financial assistance. Grants totalling £7,350 were made from the Jesse Cairns Bequest in support of travel/expenses of Members and Attenders and in support of charitable work in Northern Ireland.

The value of our investments at 31st December 2024 was £123,250.83 (2023: £119,200.86), including over £13,000 belonging to Hillsborough Worship Group.

Declaration

This report was approved at the Annual General Meeting on 21st August 2025 and is signed on behalf of trustees.

Philip McDonagh
Clerk of Trustees