

NONTHEIST FRIENDS NETWORK



Draft Minutes of Annual General Meeting Wednesday 9 December 2020, by Zoom

1 Welcome

The clerk welcomed participants and expressed great pleasure in seeing old and new faces. She introduced the Steering Group. Altogether there were 35 people present. After clarifying some ground rules for the procedure of the AGM, an extract from QF&P was read (26.39, Charles F Carter, 1971).

2 Receipt of papers previously sent

- (a) We accepted the Minutes of last Meeting held 30/03 2019, which were previously circulated.
- (b) We accepted the Annual Report for the period April 2019 to December 2020, including a financial statement from our treasurer, which all had been sent to all participants 3 weeks before the AGM and which is attached to these Minutes. We thank our treasurer, membership secretary, website manager and the present and past newsletter editors for their service.

3 Amendments to constitution

In our constitution:

- (a) In section 1, we agree to replace the words 'listed informal group' with the words 'Quaker Recognised Body' in accordance with changes in the Yearly Meeting regulations.
- (b) In section 2, we agree to add the words 'and attenders' after the word 'Friends' to reflect the open nature of our group.

4 The future of the Network

David Boulton introduced his paper, previously circulated, on the future of the group. The paper asks questions rather than giving answers.

David suggested that we have two main alternatives: to continue as we are, or to move to being a less formal group with no membership as such, operating through a flexible planning group on which anyone is welcome and mainly running a website and events at Yearly Meeting or other gatherings. The first option would need more members to be willing to serve on the Steering Group: the second would likely mean we could no longer be a Quaker Recognised Body. There is also the possibility of laying down the group altogether, if we think its purpose has now been achieved. David asked us first to consider whether the group still served a need; if we felt it does, then we would need to decide how that need might best be met.

Many people spoke to the paper, and all were positive about the group still having a purpose. One theme which emerged was that of outreach: some said that they had been lucky to find the group, and we should do more to make ourselves known. Others indicated that our existence made the Society of Friends, for them, a body open enough for them to join. One particular thought was that we should talk not so much among ourselves but 'have conversations across diversity'.

In looking at how we might continue, suggestions included making more use of technology, continuing to use Zoom to bring geographically separated people together, relying less on a formal Steering Group and instead working more with smaller, less formal 'planning groups' similar to the American model.

We also heard of the existence of an independent nontheist Quaker facebook group and will explore more contact with them.

After a lively discussion, the Clerks summarised the position as they perceived it. The Meeting clearly wished the Network to continue, and to do so as a QRB, which was seen by some as a precious asset, but the Steering Group could be smaller and do much of its work through small ad hoc planning groups, which anyone would be invited to join if they wished, for specific purposes. The Meeting accepted this summary.

The Meeting appointed Piers Maddox (Clerk), Trevor Bending, Gisela Creed, Tim Regan and Roger Warren-Evans to be the Steering Group for 2021, and asks them to find ways of working with small, open planning groups for specific tasks. At the last minute Kiera Faber and Steven Goldblatt were also accepted to join the steering group.

5 Concluding Minute and thanks

The clerk thanked the retiring members of the steering group for their work and especially David Boulton whose initiative started the group. She thanked everyone for attending, and ended with a quote by David Boulton from his introduction to 'Godless for God's sake, the collection of essays on Nontheism in contemporary Quakerism which David edited in 2006.

There is so much to do. So much in our divided, warring world, our atavistic religion, our polluted politics, our unexamined ways of thinking that we need to SUBVERT! Where shall we find the society of rebels, agitators, and outsiders, the partisan recruits to the underground army of subversion whose loyalty is pledged to the republic of heaven on earth? Who will choose to be Godless- for God's sake?

Gisela Creed, Clerk

Sarah Siddle, acting assistant Clerk