

**New York Yearly Meeting  
Fall Sessions  
November 13–15, 2009**

Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey  
Saturday, November 14, 2009, 10:00 A.M.

*Heather Cook, Clerk  
Joseph Garren, Acting Assistant Clerk  
Elaine Learnard, Recording Clerk  
Robin Alpern, Reading Clerk*

2009-11-01. The meeting remained gathered following morning open worship. Out of the silence, Clerk Heather Cook (Chatham-Summit) greeted Friends, saying she felt God's love, the pulse of the universe beating among us today. She shared an image of each of us bringing our stick of fire for today, to be part of—and witness to—something much greater than what we can do on our own. As a Yearly Meeting we hold each other accountable as we do our part in the world, with love. She asked if we are willing to offer what we have brought, and let it go, and to become the unconditional love that we experience from the Divine. She introduced those at the clerks' table.

2009-11-02. The reading clerk called the roll, asking Friends to rise by regional meeting. All regions were represented.

2009-11-03. Jotham Bailey (Chatham-Summit), of the host committee of All Friends Regional Meeting, welcomed us and shared the hope that at the rise of Sessions, we feel empowered to do our work in the world. He provided some information for the practical aspects of the day.

2009-11-04. The reading clerk read a history of Somerset Hills Monthly Meeting prepared by Carol Coulthurst. The history is attached.

2009-11-05. Barbara Menzel (New Brunswick), clerk of Shrewsbury-Plainfield Half-Yearly Meeting, reported that on September 19, 2009, at the Shrewsbury-Plainfield Half-Yearly Meeting, Somerset Hills Monthly Meeting was laid down. Its members have transferred to other meetings (primarily Rahway & Plainfield), and the funds in its accounts have been distributed to the other meetings in the Half-Yearly Meeting. Somerset Hills Worship Group is meeting at the Episcopalian Convent of St. John the Baptist in Mendham, NJ, under the care of Rahway & Plainfield Monthly Meeting, as approved by that meeting on September 20, 2009. Carol Coulthurst is serving as a contact person for the Worship Group. Friends received this report.

A Friend reported having grown up in the neighborhood of Somerset Hills Monthly Meeting and, though he never attended, he was aware of the Quaker presence. The life of a monthly meeting, he said, is never wasted.

2009-11-06. The minutes were read and approved.

2009-11-07. The reading clerk read #14 of the Advices and Queries from *Faith and Practice of Britain Yearly Meeting*:

Are your meetings for church affairs held in a spirit of worship and in dependence on the guidance of God? Remember that we do not seek a majority decision nor even consensus. As we wait patiently for divine guidance our experience is that the right way will open and we shall be led into unity.

2009-11-08. The Clerk introduced Jeffrey Aaron (New Brunswick), clerk of General Services Coordinating Committee (GSCC), to bring forward the business of that section, noting that its origins lay in supporting the work of the Witness, Nurture and Ministry coordinating committees. Jeffrey remarked that as he has begun his work as clerk, he is deeply moved by the work that has gone before on General Services and by the on-going work of the yearly meeting.

2009-11-09. The GSCC clerk introduced Treasurer Susan Bingham (Montclair) who gave the Treasurer's report. As of October 31, 2009, the closing balance of the operating fund was \$143,018 and the net difference between income and expenses was (-) \$60,986. This net is greater than we usually have at this time of year; she reminded us that in 2008, the difference was (-)\$13,391. She noted that this gap narrows every year in November and December, and she expects the same to happen this year. The full report has details on all funds, section and committee expenses and income, and is on the NYYM Web site or you may contact the Treasurer to obtain it. Friends received the report.

2009-11-10. The GSCC clerk introduced Steven Mohlke (Ithaca), clerk of the Financial Services Committee, who began by saying that though it would be a great relief if he could announce that the budget were balanced, he cannot. Noting the ways the budget affects Yearly Meeting work, he imagined what could happen by doubling the budget (additional staff or youth/young adult programming, removing financial barriers to attending Sessions, making solid commitments to wider Quaker bodies), saying that none of this money, in his view, would be wasted. Were we to cut the budget by half, while we would still be a yearly meeting, much of our work would die on the vine. He pointed out that some of the ways the budget gap has been narrowed this year are unsustainable, as they rely on funding that has come from our endowment or from funds that must be replenished in future yearly meeting budgets.

He talked about the structural challenges in the budget process, that there is not a specified person who has the authority to say, "We have sixty good programs and these are the fifty-five we are going to do this year," nor do we have an overall vision that would allow us to prioritize together. Financial Services is not hearing that the work being done is bad but rather that monthly meetings cannot sustain the cost at this time. He also hears support for the work despite the costs. He noted that there continues to be disconnection, from a faith perspective—a moving away from God—with committees vying with each other for the same pot of money, and monthly meetings not understanding the work of yearly meeting. He suggested that people could choose to connect around budgets and money, as individuals or monthly meetings. For example, one might pick a budget line one doesn't know much about and learn about it, share one's own money story with honesty and courage, or support one's monthly meeting in providing scholarships for attending Yearly Meeting events.

Financial Services has made the important transition from “assessment” to “covenant donation,” and a critical piece of this transition is communication. Financial Services has worked hard to name the programs of NYYM, calculate costs and get that information out to monthly meetings. Something not yet done is to receive feedback from monthly meetings and turn it into priorities that determine the work of NYYM. He told us that four years ago he stood in his monthly meeting and asked what NYYM was all about. Responding to that still small voice within, in search of the answer, he ended up as clerk of Financial Services. He closed with the picture of how, when we talk about our monthly meeting budget, we really listen to one another and try to understand, not with a fear that something will be taken away but with the desire to know what is necessary to do our work. His sense is that if we did this in Yearly Meeting, we would not have to cut anything, because all our work would align and feel like one. Friends rose to speak their thoughts about the yearly meeting budget process and challenges. The Clerk reminded us that time is allowed for us to consider the proposed budget in all three business meetings of Fall Sessions, if necessary.

2009-11-11. The reading clerk read #12 of the Advices and Queries from *Faith and Practice of Britain Yearly Meeting*:

When you are preoccupied and distracted in meeting let wayward and disturbing thoughts give way quietly to your awareness of God's presence among us and in the world. Receive the vocal ministry of others in a tender and creative spirit. Reach for the meaning deep within it, recognising that even if it is not God's word for you, it may be so for others. Remember that we all share responsibility for the meeting for worship whether our ministry is in silence or through the spoken word.

2009-11-12. The GSCC clerk then called on Christopher Sammond (Bulls Head-Oswego), the General Secretary, to address us. Christopher began with a thank-you to all who held him in prayer during his personal difficulties this summer, saying he has felt that he has been carried on a cloud of prayer. He then talked about how monthly meetings are changing how they deal with the question of money, some moving from passively receiving money to active fundraising that has been, for some, transformative. He raised the question of whether we are ready to let go of what we are and what we have been and move on to what we can become. He told us that he hears from those interested in being Friends that they are finding it hard to find a way into a monthly meeting. He has heard from people such as those who are Christ-centered, or with limited means, or with good incomes, or young, or who are people of color, or people right-of-center politically, or people who were formerly incarcerated, that they must struggle to stay or become part of us. If we can move away from our set of narrow requirements for who can be Quaker, we will not have to do much more to have advancement. Let us stop trimming the roots of our little tree, plant the tree by a stream of living waters and let it grow. Friends offered ministry in response to the General Secretary's message. Friends received the report. His written report is attached.

2009-11-13. The reading clerk read #19 of the Advices and Queries from *Faith and Practice of Britain Yearly Meeting*:

Rejoice in the presence of children and young people in your meeting and recognise the gifts they bring. Remember that the meeting as a whole shares a responsibility for every child in its care. Seek for them as for yourself a full development of God's gifts and the abundant life Jesus tells us can be ours. How do you share your deepest beliefs with them, while leaving them free to develop as the spirit of God may lead them? Do you invite them to share their insights with you? Are you ready both to learn from them and to accept your responsibilities towards them?

2009-11-14. The Clerk welcomed the Junior Yearly Meeting, who had joined us from their sessions, and who make us more whole by their presence.

2009-11-15. The GSCC clerk introduced Heloise Rathbone (Brooklyn), clerk of the Personnel Committee, who presented a report from the Personnel Committee on the General Secretary's 2008 request for a change in the language of his written job description. The report is attached. Friends received the report.

2009-11-16. The GSCC clerk introduced the clerk of the Sessions Committee, John Cooley (Central Finger Lakes). He reminded Friends that Summer Sessions will be a week earlier than usual: July 18–24, 2010, at Silver Bay YMCA of the Adirondacks, pending contract approval. The report is attached. Friends received the report.

2009-11-17. The reading clerk read #7 of the Advices and Queries from *Faith and Practice* of Britain Yearly Meeting:

Be aware of the spirit of God at work in the ordinary activities and experience of your daily life. Spiritual learning continues throughout life, and often in unexpected ways. There is inspiration to be found all around us, in the natural world, in the sciences and arts, in our work and friendships, in our sorrows as well as in our joys. Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment?

2009-11-18. Friends approved the minutes of this session, with the understanding that they would be revised to condense the descriptions of reports that are available in writing.

Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey  
Saturday, November 14, 2009, 3:45 P.M.

*Heather M. Cook, Clerk*  
*Joseph Garren, Acting Assistant Clerk*  
*Roger Dreisbach-Williams, Recording Clerk*  
*Robin Alpern, Reading Clerk*

2009-11-19. As we settled into worship, the reading clerk read Advice and Query #8 from Britain Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice*:

Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone, but when

we join with others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of God's love drawing us together and leading us.

2009-11-20. The Clerk introduced those at the clerks' table.

2009-11-21. The Consent Agenda, which was distributed on the Yearly Meeting's global e-mail list earlier in the week and has been available in hard copy at the registration table since this morning, was presented for approval.

Friends approved nominations and requests for release from service (see below).

Friends approved a separate minute for Paula McClure's service as Assistant Treasurer (see below).

Friends approved changes to Sessions Committee *Handbook* description, releasing reading clerks and recording clerks from the committee, and increasing the number of at-large members from seven to nine.

Friends approved changes to "Funding from Outside Sources" in the General Services section of the *Handbook*.

### **Appointments to Service**

Assistant Clerk 2010: Joseph B. Garren, Brooklyn

Ministry Coordinating Committee 2010: John Perry ('09), Bulls Head-Oswego

Committee to Revise Faith and Practice 2012: Shirley Way ('09), Central Finger Lakes

Sufferings 2012: Catharine Thomas ('09), Chatham-Summit

Personnel 2012: Keith Johnson ('09), Chatham-Summit

Sessions 2012: Martha Gurvich ('06), Wilton

Epistle 2011: Noel Palmer ('07), Westbury; Elizabeth Gordon ('09), Binghamton

Friends United Meeting 2010, alternate: Ann Davidson ('09), Farmington

Oakwood Friends School 2012: David Eskin, ('09), Purchase

Elsie K. Powell House Inc. 2013: Louise Tiano ('08), Rochester

Committee on Conscientious Objection to Paying for War 2012: Ann Geiger ('09), Butternuts

Indian Affairs 2012: Grace Perez de la Garza ('09), Fredonia

New York Council of Churches, Chaplaincy Board 2011: Alice Houghtaling ('09), Schenectady

Quaker Earthcare Witness Representative 2012: Elizabeth (Buffy) Curtis ('09), Mohawk Valley

### **Releases from Service**

Advancement, co-opted as clerk: Chad Dell, Manasquan

Committee to Revise Faith and Practice 2012: Noel Palmer, Westbury, listed in error

State of Society 2010: Janice Ninan, Collins

Aging Concerns 2011: Linda Chidsey, Housatonic

Aging Concerns 2012: Glen Bibler, Brooklyn

Epistle 2011: Gale Swiontkowski, Amawalk

Indian Affairs 2011: Marcella Younger, Rockland

Quaker Earthcare Witness Representative: Kristina Keefe-Perry, Rochester

Quaker Earthcare Witness Representative 2012: Patricia Chernoff, Morningside

2009-11-22. On July 23, 2009, New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends approved Paula R. McClure of Montclair Monthly Meeting as an Assistant Treasurer.

2009-11-23. Christine DeRoller (Old Chatham), clerk of the Young Friends In Residence (YFIR) Committee, introduced YFIR staff members Anna Obermayer (Binghamton) and Franklin Crump. Natalie Braun (Old Chatham), also on the staff, is in Ecuador. YFIR is an emerging program for New York Yearly Meeting, a dual program for young adult leaders and sixth- to ninth-grade youth. The young adults live in intentional spiritual community, participate in the local meeting, and facilitate youth (6th–9th grade) retreats. The YFIR staff are currently living in Beloved Community House in Newfield, NY, and working with their host meeting (Perry City) leading Quakerism 101 programs and other activities. The YFIR staff expect to run their first conference on December 5–6, mostly a planning conference to get input from youth and their parents about the direction the youth programming should take. They are looking for Friends to serve on the support committee, as elders and as spiritual mentors. Friends received this report.

2009-11-24. Frederick Dettmer (Purchase), clerk of Witness Coordinating Committee (WCC), spoke about the Sharing Fund: WCC has set the goal for 2010 at \$60,000 and we are part way toward this goal.

2009-11-25. The WCC clerk introduced Elizabeth Enloe, Regional Director of the New York Metropolitan Regional Office (NTMRO) of American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), who spoke about the pain of contracting (AFSC program activities have been reduced by half) and closing some offices, as well as about the opportunities that AFSC has for the future. AFSC programs around the world are sharing their experience and learning from one another, rather than working on their own as before. “We are present where people are experiencing violence” has become the unifying theme of all AFSC programs. AFSC is working with NYYM committees who share in this work. Friends asked questions about support for First People programs, rebuilding the budget and support for the organization. Friends received the report.

2009-11-26. Advice and Query #33 of Britain Yearly Meeting’s *Faith and Practice* was read:

Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs? Bear witness to the humanity of all people, including those who break society's conventions or its laws. Try to discern new growing points in social and economic life. Seek to understand the causes of injustice, social unrest and fear. Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve?

2009-11-27. The WCC clerk introduced wording on a Policy on Bequests to the Sharing Fund, which is available online at [nyym.org/witness/wcc/shar-fund-beq-09jul.pdf](http://nyym.org/witness/wcc/shar-fund-beq-09jul.pdf) and has been available in hard copy at the registration table since this morning. An endowment will be created to support the work of the Sharing Fund. Friends received the report.

2009-11-28. The WCC clerk introduced the following minute for consideration:

Upon the discernment of Friends during sessions of Nurture Coordinating Committee and Witness Coordinating Committee, Friends approve transferring the representative to Quaker Earthcare Witness and the Earthcare Working Group from the care of the Nurture Coordinating Committee to the care of the Witness Coordinating Committee. In connection with this transfer, the budget item for an annual donation to Quaker Earthcare Witness in the amount of \$150 should be transferred from the Nurture Coordinating Committee sections of the budget and financial reports of NYYM to the Witness Coordinating Committee sections of the budget and financial reports of NYYM.

Friends approved.

2009-11-29. Steve Mohlke (Ithaca), clerk of Financial Services, indicated that Budget Saturday in mid-October ended with a \$30,000 gap. Through cuts and fund raising that gap is now \$4,000. This is one percent of the budget. We have a short-term problem of how do we get a budget for 2010, and a long-term problem of how do we deal with the unsustainable practices in this budget. The Financial Services Committee recommends that Coordinating Committees reduce their budgets by a minimum of one percent.

The Conflict Transformation Committee reported from the floor that they will reduce their budget to \$500 and ask for support from those who use their services.

The Meeting was not ready to approve the proposed budget.

2009-11-30. The Meeting approved further discussions at Coordinating Committee Meetings and with Financial Services as our operating budget for 2010 is prepared.

2009-11-31. The minutes of the afternoon session were read and approved with corrections.

2009-11-32. The Meeting closed with open worship.

Chatham Summit Meeting, Chatham, New Jersey  
Sunday, November 15, 2009, 9:00 A.M.

*Heather Cook, Clerk*  
*Joseph Garren, Assistant Clerk*  
*Elaine Learnard, Recording Clerk*  
*Sandy Segal, Reading Clerk*

2009-11-33. The meeting opened with silent worship. Out of the silence, Clerk Heather Cook read from Isaiah 55:1–3 (New Revised Standard Version). She introduced those at the clerks' table, reviewed the agenda for the morning and expressed deep appreciation for the work of the host committee of All Friends Regional Meeting.

2009-11-34. The reading clerk read #17 of the Advices and Queries from *Faith and Practice* of Britain Yearly Meeting:

Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

2009-11-35. Steve Mohlke (Ithaca), clerk of the Financial Services Committee, summarized the budget proceedings to date. All four Coordinating Committees reported that they have committed to reduce their budgets by one percent, which means that Financial Services has a balanced budget to recommend. The details of the actual cuts will be available to be approved at Spring Sessions. Friends approved the proposed 2010 budget of \$520,440, which includes expected income of \$520,440, including the anticipated covenant donations of \$458,350.

2009-11-36. Sandra Beer (Old Chatham), the incoming clerk of the Financial Services Committee, brought a recommendation that the Liaison Committee and the General Secretary be asked to propose a process to guide the Yearly Meeting in discerning who we are, how we are led and how we support the work of those leadings and needs. The Liaison Committee is asked to bring this proposal to Spring Sessions. The Liaison Committee is encouraged to co-opt other members to help in the development of this process. Friends approved.

2009-11-37. The minutes were read and approved.

2009-11-38. The reading clerk read #15 of the Advices and Queries from *Faith and Practice of Britain* Yearly Meeting:

Do you take part as often as you can in meetings for church affairs? Are you familiar enough with our church government to contribute to its disciplined processes? Do you consider difficult questions with an informed mind as well as a generous and loving spirit? Are you prepared to let your insights and personal wishes take their place alongside those of others or be set aside as the meeting seeks the right way forward? If you cannot attend, uphold the meeting prayerfully.

2009-11-39. Frederick Dettmer, clerk of Witness Coordinating Committee (WCC), reported that a minute on access to health care was approved by Brooklyn Monthly Meeting on October 4, 2009, was endorsed by New York Quarterly Meeting on October 25, 2009, and was forwarded to the Yearly Meeting. Similar minutes have been approved by other monthly and regional meetings. Following discernment, Witness Coordinating Committee proposes the following minute:

*We are deeply concerned that the medical treatment currently provided in the United States is beyond the reach of many people.*

*Our belief is that every person should be treated compassionately. Each of us has unique value, and all deserve to live to the best of our potential. Health care is a basic necessity of life that our society has an obligation to provide.*

*Every person should have access to quality medical treatment. We seek a just, sustainable, and simplified health care solution.*

The Clerk of the Yearly Meeting is directed to (1) send a letter containing the Minute on Access to Health Care to all relevant elected Federal officials, (2) forward the Minute to the monthly meetings, inviting them to take action on the Minute as they discern to be appropriate, and (3) in consultation with the Communications Committee, send the Minute to media within the areas encompassed by New York Yearly Meeting.

Friends approved this minute. Friends asked that the minutes show that the minute brought forward from Brooklyn Monthly Meeting was first labored over and approved by Buffalo Monthly Meeting.

2009-11-40. The WCC clerk referred the body to the written material provided concerning becoming a cosponsor of a commission being formed to hold a hearing (in March 2010 at Riverside Church in New York City) to investigate and issue a report on rights of conscience among persons in the military. He then brought the following minute for consideration, based on the WCC Minute #11-09-04:

New York Yearly Meeting (1) approves becoming a cosponsor of the Truth Commission on Conscience in War, and (2) asks the Clerk of NYYM, the Clerk of Witness Coordinating Committee, the Committee on Conscientious Objection to Paying for War, and the Peace Concerns Coordinator to carry this concern forward, including naming representatives. Friends approved.

2009-11-41. Friends approved the minutes of this session.

2009-11-42. The Clerk read from Isaiah 55:12:

For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

2009-11-43. Friends settled into open worship in preparation for joining worship with Chatham-Summit Monthly Meeting.

## Attachments

### Somerset Hills Monthly Meeting History

#### History of Somerset Hills Monthly Meeting

The Quakers who began the Somerset Hills Monthly Meeting originally worshipped under the care of Rahway-Plainfield Monthly Meeting, in Plainfield, NJ, shortly after World War II. Several families who lived in Somerset County decided that they were numerous enough to begin a worship group closer to their homes. They began as a worship group under the care of Rahway-Plainfield in 1946. In 1955, they petitioned the Shrewsbury-Plainfield Half-Yearly Meeting for permission to form their own monthly meeting.

At first, they met in each other's homes, until the Bernardsville library became available for them to use on First Day mornings. An oil picture of one of those gatherings, painted by Dwight Dobbins, now hangs in the home of a descendent of the original group. For many years, the library was the comfortable home of Somerset Hills. The group only met during the school year, never in the summer, reasoning that with such a small group, there never would be enough Friends during the summer months. They continued to meet in the library until its board of directors decided that the Friends had to find another meeting place.

We began meeting in the Brookside Community Club in Mendham Township in 1983 as a "temporary" measure. It was a good place, with a large room, with a kitchen and two lavatories, a paved parking lot and no maintenance problems for the meeting. The drawback was that it was only one large room, with no place for a First Day School.

Somerset Hills began to look for another near-by facility to house our children. We found such a place, directly across the street at the Brookside Community Church. We were allowed to use one of their rooms, and given a key to the building, and our problems were solved!

Sadly for Somerset Hills, many people in the area found the Brookside Community Church an agreeable and hospitable home, and the church grew. Soon they needed every available space for their own parishioners, and once again, Somerset Hills drew back and re-considered its options. Without a meeting house of our own and with the cost of renting or buying property so high, it was beginning to look no longer possible for us to stay in the area. In addition, some of our members had moved away, others retired to warmer climes, and some had died.

In 2008, there were only five Friends in the meeting, one of whom is a member of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. We had several attenders who came to enjoy the silent worship, but there were too few people to maintain a viable meeting for worship. It was suggested that we relocate again, this time to the Episcopal Convent of Saint John the Baptist, also in Mendham, NJ. We investigated the site, found it warm and welcoming, and sent word to the Brookside Community Club that, after making it our home for twenty-five years, we had to change our location.

The meeting had already notified the Shrewsbury-Plainfield Half-Yearly Meeting of our continuing problems, and they granted us permission to make the change from a monthly

meeting to that of a worship group, under the care of Rahway-Plainfield Monthly Meeting. Back to our beginning!

It has been an interesting and frustrating experience to try to grow and expand our silent form of worship amid a growing sense that the world is not the same place as it was back in 1955, when our adventure began. Perhaps we might have avoided this sad ending of the laying down of our meeting if we had had a meeting house, which would have given us a much more stable and visible presence in the area.

Carol Coulthurst,  
clerk, Somerset Hills

## **General Secretary's Report**

At a time when we are facing a serious budget crunch, I think it is a good moment to review how we are doing in general, and to reassess our priorities. The charge given in 1999 to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Function of New York Yearly Meeting was "to discern how the organization of New York Yearly Meeting can best participate in the continuing renewal of the local Meetings, the Quarterly and Regional Meetings, and the Religious Society of Friends as a whole." How well have we been doing this work? What could and should we be doing better? The answers to these questions may influence budget decisions this year, and possibly redirect some of our efforts in the years to come.

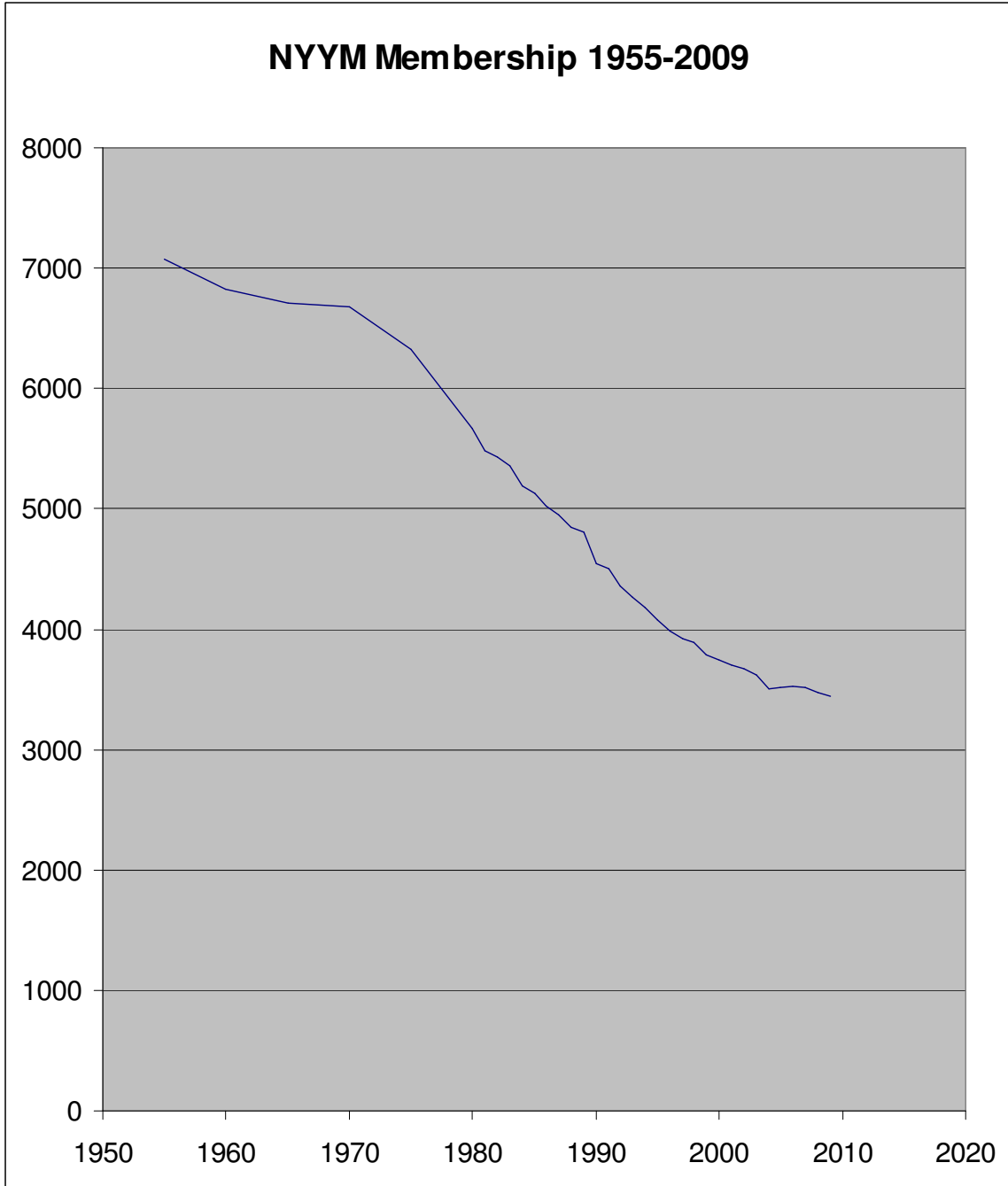
In looking at how we are doing, I have focused on membership, attendance, how much energy there has been for new initiatives, spiritual vitality, relative ease or difficulty in finding nominees to support the work, and financial support. Some of this examination will be quite subjective, and may open the door to fruitful discussion.

### **Membership**

First, a note about how we count membership: Looking at membership numbers is far from an exact science. Yearly meeting staff compiles data given to us by our Monthly Meetings. Some years, some Monthly Meetings do not offer us revised numbers. There are also times when the report from a Monthly Meeting does not reconcile with their report from the previous year. These times are noted with footnotes.

We also have many Friends who, though they are no longer worshipping with us, still find meaning in being considered a part of their Monthly Meeting, visiting on rare occasions, and frequently contributing funds for its support. Adult Friends who have grown up in a meeting and moved away and Friends who have retired elsewhere make up most of this group.

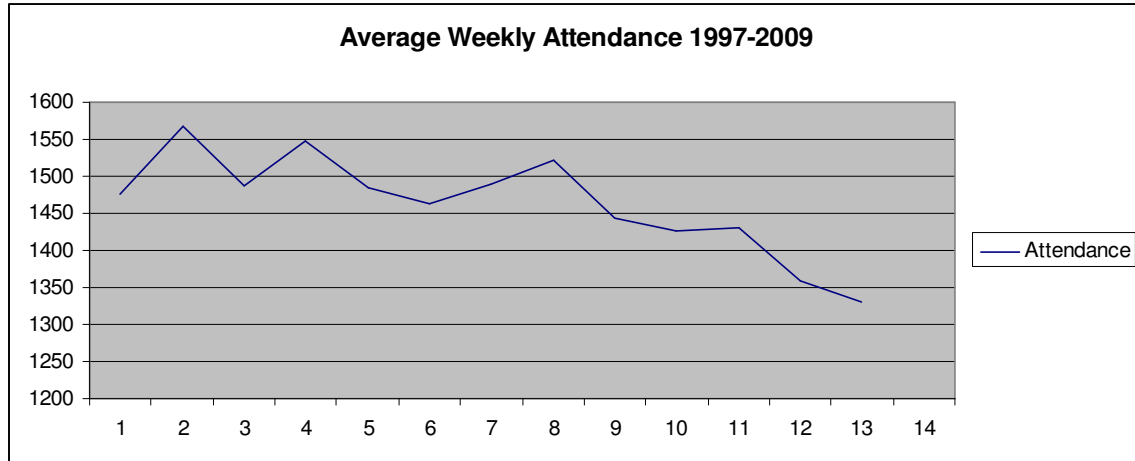
Some Monthly Meetings also have Friends on their rolls whom have not been in contact for a considerable time. Some of our meetings have sought to reach out to such Friends on their rolls, to see if they still wish to be included. Other meetings have not done so. It is virtually impossible for us to know just how much of this "dead wood" there is on our membership rolls. Even coming up with criteria for determining who does and does not constitute "dead wood" would be difficult. It is equally difficult to know if there were similar amounts of "dead wood" in 1955, 1975, and 1995. Trying to ascertain what is an accurate baseline is less fruitful than looking at the change from one year to the next. In doing so, I am assuming a comparable amount of "deadwood" in all the years on the following chart.



As you can see from this chart, we are still declining in membership, though the rate of decline has decreased markedly, almost leveling off. While I would obviously prefer growth instead of decrease, the change in rate is moderate good news, and I hope the bottom of a parabolic curve about to ascend again.

## Attendance

Our Monthly Meetings also report average attendance on First Days. In many respects, this is a much more useful indicator of how we are doing than membership numbers. The following chart graphs our reported average attendance from 1997 to the present:



In some ways, this chart paints a more negative picture than is accurate. In 2005, point 9 on this chart, we started counting attendance at Nine Partners Monthly Meeting/Lyall Federated Church differently. Before that time, we had counted all in attendance at worship. After that time, we counted only those attending who named themselves as Friends. This change resulted in a reduction of about 75 Friends, more than half of the drop in the last thirteen years.

That factor aside, our attendance had been oscillating up and down within a certain range, not a cause for concern. The last few years' data show a decrease that goes outside that range. This decline in attendance causes me much greater concern than our numbers on membership. If we did not have new people coming in, I would be even more concerned. But half of the Monthly Meetings and worship groups which shared a state of society report last year reported newcomers, new attenders, and/or new members. Conditions vary widely from meeting to meeting, but I feel that it is fair to state that we need to address retention significantly more than we need to ramp up our efforts at outreach.

Part of that effort needs to be becoming aware of how we are making it hard for some of those who would like to be with us, to do so. In the past year, I have heard from young adult Friends, Christ-Centered Friends, Friends with political views to the right of center, formerly incarcerated Friends, and Friends of Color that they are all having difficulty finding a way to be a part of our Monthly Meetings. I have heard from Friends of lesser economic means that they are struggling to be active in the work of the Yearly Meeting. Each one of these is troubling in itself, but taken in aggregate, they paint a picture of a Society that is more closed than open. I am sure that that is not what any of us wants. What do we need to address to change this?

## New Initiatives

One way of gauging the vitality of a group is to look at how much energy it has for new initiatives. When I consider the initiatives of just the last few years, I am deeply impressed by what Friends in this Yearly Meeting have been faithful to. Here is a sampling. Perhaps you can add more:

- The Aging Resources Consultation and Help, ARCH, program started up.
- The Spiritual Nurture Working Group was formed, and created an upcoming series of retreats.
- Collaborations are under way with AVP and AFSC on prison ministry.
- The Personnel Committee is in the process of a total revision of the Personnel Handbook.
- We began sending Peacebuilding and humanitarian aid to Friends in the Republic of Georgia.
- We started new worship groups at Gouvenuers and Cayuga Correctional Facilities, and the Bedford-Stuyvesant worship group at the Redemption Center.
- We rekindled the worship group at Dansville, NY, and are increasing the number of worships per month at Sullivan and Woodbourne Prison Worship Groups.
- The Communication Committee is in the process of constructing a new website.
- The Young Friends in Residence Program was envisioned and made a reality.
- The new Youth Committee has taken on the work recommended by the Task Group on Youth.
- The Financial Services and Communication Committees collaborated with staff to better communicate the substance of the work done at a YM level.
- The First Day School Working Group formed and is up and running.
- The new Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee has been formed and starting its work.
- Spring and Fall Sessions youth groups have become a part of our practice, supported by JYM.
- We began holding Meetings for Discernment.

## **Spiritual Vitality**

This facet of our collective condition is the most subjective and hardest to quantify. It is obviously expressed through all the other facets. My personal sense, informed by others' subjective comments, is that we are growing significantly, both as individuals and as a body, in depth and faithfulness. The Spiritual Nurture Task Group noted a sense of increased spiritual vitality and community as a result of the Drawing Out Gifts series, and that this spiritual charge has diminished some over time. With that in mind, they have created a series of eight retreats designed to nurture those Friends enlivened by the first series, as well as welcoming in Friends who were not a part of that experience.

## **Friends' Willingness to Be Nominated**

The current clerk of our Nominating Committee told me that despite shrinking economic resources of individuals, Monthly Meetings, and Yearly Meeting committees, she has experienced the same level of willingness, or better, by Friends asked to serve. She tempered this by saying that it is hard to separate Friends' willingness from the benefit of having committee members who are good at recognizing the gifts of Friends and inviting them to share those gifts. She said that the nominating process has also been helped by more committees doing work via conference call when possible.

One area she said she hopes we can improve upon is in nominating our younger Friends to committees. Three-year terms are difficult for Friends in high school and college to commit to.

## **Financial Support**

Non-profits are facing an average shortfall of 40%. At Budget Saturday, we were facing a shortfall of about 5%. I have been moved by the degree of support that I have heard from our Monthly Meetings. Many have dug deep and stretched mightily. Some have done fundraisers in order to honor their covenant donation. Some have even gone back and increased that amount in response to the request from Financial Services.

I have heard great appreciation from Friends for the work of Financial Services in creating a project-based budget. They have commented that that approach, in conjunction with the standard budget spreadsheets, has given them a greater understanding of where the money goes than they ever had before. Without this work, I don't think that we would be in as good a financial position as we are right now.

## **Conclusions**

Despite some reduction in numbers, we have greatly expanded the work we have been called to, addressing our need to deepen spiritually, to care for our children, young adults, and aged Friends, to be faithful in our witness, and work towards bridging the gap between our Monthly Meetings and the Yearly Meeting. We are continuing to lay the crucial foundations for growth in depth as well as numbers, and we are doing that work well. And we have done this while keeping the budget relatively flat since 2005.

And there is much yet to do. In my 2006 report to summer sessions, I named six areas to which we needed to give significant attention:

- 1. Closing the divide that separates Monthly Meetings from the Yearly Meeting organizational structure.**
- 2. Coming to a unified, clear vision of who we are, where we are going, and why.**
- 3. Passing on the substance of our faith to our children.**
- 4. Becoming more skillful at resolving conflict.**
- 5. Better welcoming and integrating the newcomers who are joining us.**
- 6. Addressing the spiritual nurture of existing Friends.**

We have done some work in all these areas, and yet I see all of these needs to still be somewhere between a state of "pressing" and "quite urgent." Of these needs, I see bridging the Monthly Meeting/Yearly Meeting gap, coming to a common vision, and developing a coordinated and coherent approach to how we nurture our children and youth, to be our greatest priorities.

We have this budget year, and perhaps one other, to take a really hard look at how we are addressing the above needs, and making some substantive changes, not just tweaking what we are already doing. This year's budget is bolstered by many one-time adjustments that we cannot repeat next year. Even if the economic recovery proceeds well, it will be two years or so before most non-profits feel the benefit of that. We cannot assume much rosier conditions in the economy for our budget a year from now, or even in two or three. We cannot continue our present course without some substantial changes in how we raise money and how we spend it.

I see this budget crunch as a real opportunity for us to look at our priorities, break out of our unconscious attachment to the ways things are, and to look afresh at how God is leading us in our work together. We have just a little breathing room in which to come to a unified vision of

our work as a body, a vision that is well connected to, and supported by our constituent Monthly Meetings, and to develop the fundraising mechanisms to adequately support that vision. If we do this well, it will build community, and release untapped energy as well as the financial resources to do the work that God calls us to do.

Christopher Sammond (Bulls Head-Oswego)  
General Secretary

## Personnel Committee Report

### General Secretary job description change proposal

- History
  - In 2002, specific discomfort was expressed by Friends with the notion of a pastor, or of reference to ministry at all, in the position of General Secretary when the first report of the Staffing and Structure Committee was presented to the body at Summer Sessions for the purpose of establishing the position of a general secretary.
  - In 2003, the recommendation was further seasoned and presented again without the references that were construed as naming the General Secretary as a spiritual leader or pastor of the Yearly Meeting. The position was then approved.
  - In October of 2008, a change in the job description was proposed by the General Secretary for the purpose of reducing his federal taxes, and their use for war making, by virtue of his being able to receive an untaxed housing allowance as a minister. As noted to Friends several times, if the process advances, the net cost to New York Yearly Meeting, other than any possible bookkeeping, legal and accounting work to effect the change, will likely be less than the present cost thereafter, because certain benefits will be reduced because the salary per se will be reduced. The General Secretary will also likely take home less pay for similar reasons.
  - In December of 2008, the General Secretary's Supervisory Task Group initially approved the request, per their minute:
    - *Christopher Sammond brought a concern to the General Secretary's Supervisory Task Group, in a letter dated October 29, 2008, that his job description as general secretary of NYYM be clarified as to the fact that the position of general secretary has functions of Friends' ministry. The Task Group is in unity that the position of general secretary is ministry as understood by Friends and requests addition of language to this effect to the written understanding of the general secretary's job description.*
  - On January 20, 2009, Personnel Committee noted the following in its minutes:
    - *The committee approved the following sense of a minute: **The performance of the position of General Secretary of NYYM fulfills all requirements of Friend's ministry.** There was also some discussion about whether this applied to others on NYYM staff. The committee needs to discuss this further.*
  - The concern has also been discussed by General Services Coordinating Committee (GSCC) and reviewed by the clerk of the Ministry Coordinating Committee. A request was made by GSCC for wider input of Friends in light of the history of concerns about the job description.
  - At a presentation at Summer Sessions 2009, Friends requested that the matter be deferred for further consideration of individual Friends and monthly meetings, and for their input to the Personnel Committee.

- Responses summary follows
- Various aspects of the proposed change will require further consideration and possible action if and when there is approval by the body. These further concerns should be borne in mind as Friends consider the request:
  - There will need to be consideration of the implications to other staff and their particular ministries.
  - If this change in wording is approved by the body, then it falls to the Personnel Committee and the GSCC to decide whether this change is enough to meet the conditions set forth by the IRS for a housing allowance: As Quakers we do not easily meet the three qualifications that the IRS has set down for ministers and housing allowances, and their position has been revised and tightened in the last few years. It is this situation which has brought forth the articles and opinions that suggest we might not pass the approval of the IRS and thus might need to be audited, an event that could be financially expensive in terms of time that would need to be expended by our professional accountants and likely very time consuming of our staff and volunteers, a serious concern even in the best of times.
  - If the proposal is approved, there will need to be separate consideration by Personnel if the Committee is comfortable revising remuneration to include housing allowance. If so, the amounts will need to be decided upon.
  - What will be the implications for the advertising for and hiring of future individuals for this position with this revised job description and revised pay structure?

We need to do more discernment work on this request. More input from Friends to the committee about this concern will always be welcome as we strive to gain clarity about a possible recommendation.

### **Responses summary**

To date, we have received 20 written responses from throughout the yearly meeting, which we have characterized in our perception as positive, negative or uncertain (or uncomfortable) and grouped by individuals and monthly meetings. Of the twenty, thirteen individuals responded, of which 8 were negative and 5 uncertain. Of the monthly meetings, seven responded, of which there were 4 that were positive, two negative, and one uncertain. We are very much aware that our interpretations are of course subjective characterizations.

The four positive responses, which were all from monthly meetings, were mostly simple minutes of support of the proposal. Uncertain responses indicated hesitation about the process and its various potential ramifications, while negative responses often expressed discomfort about the use of the term “ministry” for different reasons, including the implications of singling out an individual within our midst or one of the employees within our midst, or the implication of having a “paid minister.” In addition, there was reference more than once to the fact that there was concern expressed by the body during the original proposal for the job description that the position should not include ministry per se; therefore, this is a change that goes against that

understanding. One Friend indicated that the current proposal felt like a “bait-and-switch.” One meeting and at least one individual indicated that the purpose of the change may not really be served in that it does not constitute war tax resistance, since it is not tax refusal nor does it constitute tax witness, since it does not include any form of public statement; it simply will mean that less taxes will be paid because of the individual’s tax category, which will have no witness significance to IRS or other public entity, and furthermore, the reduced taxes will not necessarily reduce war taxes since all tax income goes into a common pot for all governmental expenditures, including items that we are all likely to support.

In addition to the written responses, there is the sense that there remains a “buzz” among Friends, many of whom may be uncertain or uncomfortable, but who have not put their discomfort down in words. Nevertheless, there is also the sense that the work of our General Secretary has indeed included ministry as we know it, and that that also applies at least to the work of the Associate Secretary. Friends have frequently expressed appreciation of the hard work of our General Secretary and of our staff in general.

Heloise Rathbone (Brooklyn)  
clerk, Personnel

## **Sessions Committee Report**

Sessions Committee and the working group on Summer Sessions affordability and site selection met in September. Along with other business we reviewed results of the surveys that Friends had completed at Silver Bay during Summer Session, and the results from a later survey sent to meetings for distribution. The compiled comments and the statistics from both surveys are available for review.

The surveys brought helpful information on several other questions, but the most controversial issue was our suggestion at last Summer Sessions that 2010 Summer Sessions should be shortened from six to five days. Our working group and Sessions Committee as a whole felt that, whatever a numerical majority of survey participants favored, we were not clear to make the suggested change. Instead we are planning a six-day schedule in 2010. Members of our working group on affordability and future sites will be available to talk with anyone after lunch Sunday at Chatham-Summit meeting house. Look for our sign.

We continue to explore cost-saving measures, and ways of raising more funds for assistance in attending summer sessions. Working group members are seeking information from other sites and Silver Bay to see how a different place with significant cost advantage and facility benefits could compare.

Our next committee meeting for Summer Sessions planning is January 30. If you have suggestions about theme, format or special needs, let us hear from you as soon as you can.

Spring Sessions is being hosted by Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting at Chautauqua Institution near Mayville, NY, April 9–11. A comfortable and convenient residential conference center at Chautauqua promotes easy attendance of sessions and committee meetings. Convenience of location for our western-most Friends means a long trip for those from the east. Accommodations will be coordinated for anyone who wishes to plan a stop-over stay with Friends along the way to Chautauqua or back home.

John Cooley (Central Finger Lakes)  
clerk, Sessions Committee