

## **General Secretary's Report** Fall Sessions 2007

### **Growing in the Spirit**

A lot of my work is making connections—between one Friend or meeting's need and a particular resource, between one Friend who has a particular leading and others who share that same leading, and between Friends with common spiritual experience or common hunger. Making those connections is wonderfully gratifying. Being able to make those connections comes from a broad-based knowledge of this Yearly Meeting and how the Spirit is moving amongst us.

So while I expect that some of what I will share about our collective life is known to many of you, and thus risks being “old news,” I am confident that most everyone here will not know about all of the many things that are going on across our community. I want to try to convey to you the vibrancy of what Spirit is doing through us and in us.

I see us continuing to do the work that God has put before us. In doing so, we continue to lay the groundwork for greater growth in spiritual depth, unity, witness, and numbers. Here is a brief overview of some of the efforts underway.

**We are becoming more and more active in being a visible presence in our communities.** So far this year we have had 21 different events where either monthly meetings hosted events designed to welcome the public into their worship space, or monthly or regional meetings made our presence known at community festivals, peace fairs, and the like. The Advancement Committee has also been encouraging every monthly meeting to have a Web site, and Paul Busby has been helping meetings to create or update sites. And as a result of the Advancement consultation last March, there is more coordination at quarterly/regional/half-yearly levels by Friends who carry a concern for advancement and outreach.

**We are better supporting and nurturing our youth.** There are a burgeoning number of youth groups throughout the Yearly Meeting. We are getting more intentional about nurturing our youth, being particularly aware of the stage when they enter young adulthood, when they are too old for the Powell House youth program and JYM and not yet feeling a part of the wider community. The Task Group on Youth is working to heighten awareness of our need to nurture our children and youth, and their work is having a significant impact. Our theme for next summer's Annual Session, "Spiritual Community: Becoming One Across the Spectrum of Age," addresses our need to better integrate Friends of all ages into the fabric of our community. The Advancement Committee is also hosting a multigenerational retreat immediately before Summer Sessions entitled “Becoming One Body” where we hope that Friends from a variety of generations will share their spiritual experience with each other. And, to better support the adults who are nurturing this increasing amount of youth work, I have initiated, in consultation with some Friends devoted to this

work, a Friendly Adult Presence training at Farmington-Scipio's Spring Gathering, facilitated by Mike Clark and available to Friends from across the Yearly Meeting.

**We are attending to better ways of supporting and integrating adult young Friends.** We had over 70 adult young Friends at this past Summer Session. They initiated a powerful session of worship sharing about their role in our community. Adult young Friends are also hosting a retreat at Brooklyn MM this fall, and have revived their newsletter. As staff we have given some logistical support with database management and support of Friends in leadership roles, but most all of the energy behind the renewal in this generation has come from these younger Friends. Helen Garay Toppins has been exploring how internships devoted to nurturing these Friends might better inform us how to structure more long-term support. Friends can give to a specific fund that will be used to create this internship. In addition to all this, Advancement committee is exploring ways to do campus outreach to college students who have a history with Friends or who may be Friends but don't know it yet.

**We are at work in proactively addressing the spiritual needs of Friends—all the way along the continuum from new attenders to seasoned Friends.** Six of our quarterly/regional/half-yearly meetings are engaged in this on some level, whether that be supporting intervisitation, organizing retreats to provide a spiritual boost and promote community, sharing adult religious education resources, or having region-wide extended worship opportunities. The Spiritual Nurture Committee continues to meet in discernment as to what efforts at a Yearly Meeting level might best support the spiritual nurture of individual Friends. The last of the Drawing Out Gifts series of workshops will be held at Powell House later this month. It will be a retreat for those who have attended earlier retreats, hearing about how the Truth is prospering in those Friends. The Spiritual Nurture Committee is eager to hear from the experience of these Friends, perhaps gaining insights as to what might be most helpful in supporting Friends in the development of their gifts in the Spirit.

**We are changing our structures to encourage more grassroots discernment in our life as a Yearly Meeting.** This March we will have the first of our Meetings for Discernment, opportunities for Yearly Meeting-wide collective listening in the Spirit. I am optimistic about the impact these meetings will have on our community as a whole. Our clerk is also initiating changes in our practice of worship with attention to business to better ground our business in worshipful discernment.

**We are supporting a multitude of different expressions of our witness in the world— giving tangible expression to our spiritual life.** From our witness around care of the earth, to our prison ministry, to our work in conscientious objection to military taxation, to our witness against torture, to

work in Indonesia, Colombia, Bolivia, and Kenya, to my representing us at the meeting with Iranian President Ahmadinejad, the list of our witness is impressive and inspiring. We are indeed making our faith visible and tangible. Our spirituality nurtures and inspires our witness, which nurtures and inspires our life in the Spirit. And in being faithful to this ministry, we are strengthened in our life together.

**We are seeing more and more Friends led to travel in the Ministry.**

Some Friends have already asked for and received travel minutes, and others are at various stages in this process. These Friends are feeling called to travel under a wide range of concerns. It is exciting to see the number and diversity of these leadings.

**We are witnessing greater participation in the work going on at a Yearly Meeting level.** There are many Friends now serving on Yearly Meeting committees and task groups who are new to Yearly Meeting service. And we had 126 first-time attenders at Summer Sessions, some of whom asked how they could be of service.

Obviously, there is much that we are tending very well, and this work is already bearing good fruit as we are faithful to the leadings of the Spirit. I have already heard Friends talking about a new vitality in the Yearly Meeting, and from all that I am witnessing, this is quite true. And we have much work in front of us. In addition to tending to the above work already underway, some of the more pressing aspects of this work are:

- befriending, not just welcoming, newcomers to our meetings
- discerning a clearer vision of what we are called to be and do as a unified people
- communicating the work that is going on at a Yearly Meeting level to the body of the Yearly Meeting
- coming to terms with our own diversity, and discerning how we are led to be in relationship with the rest of FUM
- encouraging participation in the Meetings for Discernment
- Seeing more clearly where intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict are intruding upon our discernment

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