

**General Secretary's Report
Spring Sessions, 2008
Oakwood Friends School**

I'd like to take the opportunity of this report to convey to Friends some of what your staff is doing on behalf of the Yearly Meeting. Much of what we do is behind the scenes, and if you didn't happen to have direct knowledge of some of our work, you might not hear of it at all. Rather than give you a laundry list the many things each of our staff does, I'd like to highlight just a few that most of you probably don't know about.

Most of Paul Busby's work as communications director is highly visible. In addition to the more broadly visible work of *Spark*, *InfoShare*, and global e-mails, Paul has been helping monthly meetings to create Web sites linked to the Yearly Meeting Web site. Most seekers these days are finding us through the Web; if we want to be found, we need to have a presence there. The Advancement Committee has a goal of all Monthly Meetings' having at least a static Web page, recently updated. Paul has been helping meetings do this. We now have active Web sites for about two-thirds of our meetings and worship groups which can have them. My hope is that by year's end we will approach full representation on the Web.

Helen Garay Toppins has been working on supporting worship groups. She has been organizing outreach for Ticonderoga WG, provided support and counsel for the new Bedford-Stuyvesant WG, strengthened the worship group in Woodbourne Correctional facility by recruiting additional volunteers, and persisted in seeking ways through the red tape of the NY State Department of Corrections as Friends continue to try to respond to a request for a new worship group at Fishkill Correctional Facility. The first meeting of the new Bedford Stuyvesant WG was so well attended that they had trouble fitting everyone in. The worship group's continuing-care committee hopes to have expanded facilities available by May 4. Helen has a passion for supporting worship groups. If yours needs support in some way, please contact her.

She has also been working to help some of our smallest monthly meetings by helping them to send out letters of invitation to Friends who vacation regularly in their area. In our smallest meetings, the addition of one or two seasoned Friends can make a significant difference in a day's worship. Some of the Friends she recruited for Woodbourne fall into this vacationing-Friends category, and she feels that there are others who would attend meetings close to their vacation spot if they knew about them and had an invitation from them. Helen has been working to make that connection.

In addition to that, she has also been making public presentations, most recently at Montclair MM and at City Lights, an organization devoted to supporting spiritual seekers in the greater metropolitan New York City area. At City Lights she led the group in worship sharing centered around the testimony of equality.

One of the participants reported “Not only did we learn about the Quaker way, but through practicing this way with Helen, we learned more about one another and our experiences of social justice.” Helen also organized our Quaker presence at the River to River peace demonstration marking the fifth anniversary of our invasion of Iraq, and organized the potluck and meeting with David Zarmebka of the African Great Lakes Initiative at the NYYM office.

I have been working with both the Communications and Financial Services Committees to create materials to better communicate with the body of this Yearly Meeting the scope and nature of the work being done at a Yearly Meeting level. I hope to have these materials available in the next few months. I have found that very few Friends in the body of this Yearly Meeting have a clear sense of the work that is being done. I have also found that when such Friends are accurately informed of this work, they are quite impressed. The Yearly Meeting as an organization needs to do a better job of communicating its work to those who support it. My work with these committees hopes to address this need.

I have become aware of the possibility of grant funding which might allow us to address needs for supporting our work with youth and young adult Friends sooner and in a more comprehensive way than we had perhaps envisioned when we created a budget line for that work. At the same time, I continue to hear from various Friends of the need for staff support in these areas. I have initiated a series of conversations about how we as a body might better support Friends in the 13–35-year range. This is our future, and we need to do a better job of nurturing these Friends.

I had the pleasure of attending an FGC consultation on Quaker Quest, a dynamic process combining inreach, public witness, and outreach, which was developed over seven years by Friends in London. Since that time, I have been working with our Advancement Committee and FGC to see how we can bring the Quaker Quest process to monthly meetings here. Jane Berger shared enough of the process at the second Advancement Consultation to energize that group of Friends, who, with the participation and support of Helen and myself, laid the groundwork for bringing that rich advancement process to NYYM. Since then, I have been in conversation with FGC as they put together a grant proposal which should offer substantial financial support to us as we enter into this work.

Walter Naegle provides crucial behind-the-scenes support for much of the work we do as staff. He has effectively used our database to identify Friends within possible travel distance of various prison worship groups. He has researched media outlets to support outreach for the Ticonderoga WG. He served as registrar for Meetings for Discernment and will also be the registrar for the “Responsible Adult Presence (RAP)” training Mike Clark will be providing this May, and for the Singing Weekend happening later this month.