

## **General Secretary's Report New York Yearly Meeting Fall Sessions, 2005 Albany Academy for Girls**

This report highlights aspects of Yearly Meeting renewal that your staff has had some involvement in. It is a pleasure to report that a great deal of progress is being made on many fronts.

The work on having *Spark* speak more directly to the needs of monthly meetings and worship groups is going well. your staff have received lots of positive comments on the first topical issue, on Advancement. The second, on war tax witness, is well underway, with Friends Dan Jenkins and Jens Braun coordinating that issue. Friends from Ministry and Counsel and Nurture Coordinating Committees are working with the Communications Committee and staff to identify point people and possible authors for the coming issues on worship and nurturing our children and youth. If you have ideas for topics for upcoming issues, please talk to a member of the Communications Committee or a staff person about it.

The series of retreats on developing Friends' gifts is coming together, with four of the six facilitators chosen; a fifth, having been asked, is now in discernment. This series was initiated by your general secretary, is under the care of Ministry and Counsel Coordinating Committee, and is receiving substantial financial support from our Advancement Committee and from FGC's Traveling Ministries Program.

There are now five Friends traveling under the care of Ministry and Counsel Coordinating Committee, supported in part by funds from the Trustees and in part by the operating budget. The advisory group that gives these Friends support and oversight is now meeting regularly, and is composed of the clerks of Advancement and Ministry and Counsel, a member of MCCC, currently Ann Davidson, and the general secretary.

In addition to sharing visitation reports from our traveling Friends, this advisory group helps identify meetings that most need visitation support and coordinates our efforts to help them. I have witnessed this coordinated effort working very well in two particular recent instances, and I am enthusiastic about the potential this model has for helping meetings that need it.

There is a separate fund, the Traveling Friends Fund, to support this type of visitation. Any individual Friend or meeting may give to this fund. I encourage Friends to consider supporting this investment in our future.

Your staff of five persons has been logging our hours for almost a year now, and by spring sessions we will have a breakdown on how each of us uses our time. Because the cost of staff appears in the administrative portion of the budget, it is easy to misconstrue, and to assume that all or most of each staff person's time goes toward administrative duties. Significant portions of staff time go toward direct support of monthly and regional meetings, as well as supporting work that is under the care Ministry and Counsel, Nurture, and Witness Coordinating Committees. As the nature of the mix of staff duties varies widely each month, the only way to get a reasonably accurate picture is to track an entire year's work.

Even with a whole year's data, our numbers will not perfectly reflect current realities. Since we began keeping this data I have instituted a shift in staff responsibilities, freeing up Helen Garay Toppins to do more work in advancement and visitation. Our current patterns of staff work are already different than they were even six months ago. But these numbers will be good enough for the Yearly Meeting to weigh how well our staff's work reflects the Yearly Meeting's priorities.

In order to free up more of Helen Garay Toppins' time, Paul Busby has taken over as editor of *Spark*. Helen and I are both very pleased with his work. He has also taken on greater responsibility for the *Yearbook* and the *Advance Reports*.

This shift has allowed Helen, our administrative secretary, the latitude to pursue critical portions of her job description involving advancement that she has heretofore been too busy to address adequately. She has been providing critical support for the resurgence of the Circle of Young Friends, and has been the staff mainstay behind efforts to initiate new worship groups in the Bronx and Peekskill areas. She has been doing some visitation when needed, as well.

I will not describe Walter Naegle's and Judy Inskip's work here because it has been less direct in supporting the elements of renewal covered in this report. But without this background support, the rest of us could not be doing the work that we are doing for New York Yearly Meeting. They serve a critical part of a team effort that I feel is working very well.

I am very grateful for the competent, caring, and dedicated staff which is supporting this Yearly Meeting. These Friends work very hard, and rarely receive the recognition they deserve. When you get a chance, please thank these Friends for their service. A little appreciation goes a long way.

Growth in the Spirit is very difficult to define or measure. It is also a slow, organic process that does not yield many immediate results. I feel we are at a stage of planting many seeds, and tending to new and tender growth. It is my sense that we are doing the right things, and that good fruit will follow from this faithful work. It is indeed a rich blessing to be a part of it.

Christopher Sammond  
General Secretary