

## Proposed Changes to General Secretary Job Description

This summer at our Silver Bay sessions we will be asked to consider a minute from the Personnel Committee proposing a change to the job description of the general secretary. By adding the words “The responsibilities of this position include, at the Yearly Meeting Level, all the functions of Friends ministry that may be required” it would be possible for the Personnel Committee to designate a portion of the general secretary’s salary as a housing allowance. This would not be a salary increase, but would change the tax implications for both New York Yearly Meeting and the general secretary, especially in relation to the FICA (Social Security) taxes. NYYM would no longer pay the employer’s portion of the FICA taxes on the housing allowance because they would be paid by the employee as a self-employment tax. Following is some background information on the current job description and then the minute from the Personnel Committee which was presented for information at our Spring Sessions. Additionally there is contact information for two Friends from the Personnel Committee if you have any comments or questions about this proposed change.

At our Summer Sessions in July, 2003, we approved the report and recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing and Structure that we search for and hire a general secretary to serve the needs of the Yearly Meeting. The report, as approved, contained a list of suggested areas of responsibility for a general secretary position, and from these suggestions the General Services Coordinating Committee created the following job description:

### **JOB DESCRIPTION—GENERAL SECRETARY**

#### **Qualifications:**

1. Must be a member of the Religious Society of Friends and be or become a member of a meeting within NYYM.
2. Have understanding of and experience with the dynamics of Friends’ Meetings.
3. Have the ability and willingness to work with Friends who have diverse interpretations of Quaker faith and practice and at the same time maintain one’s own integrity and spiritual grounding.
4. Have the ability to organize and maintain a flexible work schedule which includes frequent weekend availability.
5. Possess personnel management skills. Be knowledgeable about the use of computer technology to enhance effectiveness and communications.

6. Possess strong interpersonal and conflict resolution skills.
7. Possess strong written and oral communications skills.

**Responsibilities:**

1. Visit monthly, quarterly, and regional meetings, seeking to connect our distant meetings with one another through sharing concerns and ministry.
2. Support and nurture emerging worship groups.
3. Work closely with the Clerk of the Yearly Meeting and serve ex-officio as a member of the Liaison Committee for the purpose of nurturing the life of the Yearly Meeting community.
4. In conjunction with the Yearly Meeting Clerk, maintain a liaison with wider Friends' groups. When necessary and appropriate, interpret the Religious Society of Friends to the wider community in statements and actions, including speaking to the press, which articulate our historic peace testimony and are in keeping with Faith and Practice, other Friends' testimonies, and relevant Yearly Meeting minutes. Whenever possible, reference should be made to these sources.
5. Supervise and evaluate the work of the Administrative Secretary. The general secretary will be ultimately responsible for the overall good functioning of the Yearly Meeting office.

The Personnel Committee and the General Services Coordinating Committee are asking that you consider the following addition to this job description:

“The responsibilities of this position include, at the Yearly Meeting Level, all the functions of Friends ministry that may be required.”

**This report, printed below, was presented for information only at the Spring Session, 2009, and is to be brought forth for consideration at our Summer Session, 2009. If you have any questions or comments about this report and its recommendation, we ask that you contact either Heloise Rathbone at 718-636-8253 or hcrathbone@gmail.com or Jeffrey Aaron at 732-247-9430 or jephreyaaron@aol.com.**

**Report from the Personnel Committee**

Christopher Sammond came to this committee with a concern to have the ministerial nature of the work he does in his role as general secretary acknowledged at an institutional level by the Yearly Meeting. He wishes to take advantage of the alternate set of tax codes available to individuals who work in a ministerial capacity for different religious institutions as part of his effort to reduce the amount he pays for war and its accompanying horrors. These alternate tax

rules allow for some of an individual's compensation to be in the form of a housing allowance, which is not subject to federal income tax. (That same portion is then not eligible for employer contributions for social security; the employee must pay for that out of pocket.)

While we acknowledge that as Friends we all minister to each other, not all Friends are paid for their ministry. Christopher made it clear to us that he is not seeking to be recorded as a minister. He is seeking language in his letter of appointment similar to that of his approximate counterpart Jonathan Vogel-Borne, in New England Yearly Meeting, who has filed his taxes under these rules for almost twenty years. Some monthly meetings which do not have a practice of recording use a similar practice to give official sanction to Friends serving as chaplains.

This concern has already been discussed by the General Secretary's Supervisory Task Group. The following minute came from that meeting:

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. (Approved 12/11/08)

The concern has also been discussed by General Services Coordinating Committee and vetted by the clerk of the Ministry Coordinating Committee.

After weighing these concerns, it was clear to us that we support the witness which prompted Christopher to seek this designation. Equally important, we were clear that making such a designation was an accurate portrayal of the work he has been doing with us. We framed the following minute:

We agree to offer the general secretary the option of receiving part of his/her compensation as a housing allowance. To facilitate this we will add to his/her job description and letter of appointment a paragraph stating:

“The responsibilities of this position include, at the Yearly Meeting Level, all the functions of Friends ministry that may be required.”

For the Personnel Committee,  
Heloise Rathbone, Clerk

**If this recommendation is accepted, it will not entail additional expense to the Yearly Meeting, since the new “housing expense” portion would be taken from the salary line. There may actually be a reduction in costs to the Yearly Meeting by virtue of the reduction in social security costs related to salary.**

