

**Information and Background
on the Statement of Leadings and Priorities
(July 10, 2014)**

The Priorities Working Group (“PWG”) offers these short answers to questions about the Statement of Leadings and Priorities (the “Priorities Statement”):

1. Why are we—the Body of Friends gathered as New York Yearly Meeting—being asked to consider the Priorities Statement?

During the late 2000's (and in the years since then), Friends gathered at sessions of NYYM struggled with considering and approving budgets for the Yearly Meeting. We consistently found our programmatic goals outreached our financial means, and we lacked clarity on how to allocate our finite resources (money, staff and volunteer time) among our many, many faithful leadings. Friends also expressed frustration that the Yearly Meeting seemed to function apart from the priorities, needs and interests of the monthly meetings. In response, at Fall Sessions in 2009, we approved a minute to develop 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.” (Minute 2009-11-36.)

At Spring Sessions 2011, Friends united around a process “to discern accurately and corporately what work God would have us do” and agreed that “the product of this discernment process, presented as a Statement of Leadings and Priorities, will become - upon approval - the priorities of New York Yearly Meeting as a community for the ensuing four to six years.” (Minute 2011-04-33.) Since then, PWG has been undertaking the work directed by the Body to identify where the Spirit is leading Friends in NYYM, to test those findings with Friends through their monthly and regional meetings and at YM gatherings, and to prepare a Priorities Statement that accurately reflects Friends’ leadings and priorities.

2. How did PWG discern the leadings and priorities of Friends in NYYM?

Members of PWG met in worship with 78 meetings and worship groups, including prison worship groups, to listen to Friends sharing their reflections on the life, ministry and witness of their meetings and their visions of the work the Yearly Meeting is called to do. PWG consists of 14 Friends, including representatives from the regional meetings, the coordinating committees and Financial Services Committee, as well as the Yearly Meeting Clerk, Assistant Clerk and General Secretary. PWG followed-up each session with a written report to the meeting confirming the messages, insights and concerns that had been shared. Over the last year, PWG further reflected back to all the regional meetings the sense of the leadings and priorities that had been heard in the visits to virtually all the monthly meetings. Envisioning priorities also was the subject of a Meeting for Discernment. Finally, at each YM session, PWG reported the progress in discerning priorities and leadings emerging from the visitations to monthly meetings.

3. Who chose the Priorities?

The priorities have been chosen by Friends throughout NYYM, collected in their monthly meetings. As decided at Spring Sessions 2011, the priorities are intended to “reflect the leadings and needs arising from our meetings and individual Friends.” (Minute 2011-04-34.) In worshiping with monthly meetings, reflecting back findings to the meetings and regional meetings, and preparing the Priorities Statement, PWG sought to faithfully fulfill its charge “(a) to gather the sense of the monthly and regional meetings and of individual Friends as to how the Spirit is at work among us and where it is leading us as a society of Friends in the immediate future, and (b) to distill those insights and discern from them a proposed Statement of Leadings and Priorities that is both prophetic and workable. . . .” (Minute 2011-04-35.)

4. What will happen when the Priorities Statement is approved?

The approved priorities will be the guidepost by which we organize the work and allocate the resources of the Yearly Meeting for the coming years. At Spring Sessions 2011, we decided that the “approved Statement should serve to focus the energy and resources of the Yearly Meeting” for the next 4-6 years. (Minute 2011-04-33.) We agreed that “Yearly Meeting committees and coordinating committees will use these Priorities in planning their services and initiatives. Staff will use these Priorities to develop a work plan. Financial Services Committee will use them in preparing budgets. The Trustees will be asked to consider them in allocating trust funds, within the limits of trust instruments.” (Minute 2011-04-38.) In the first year (or so), this will include implementing the First-Year actions described in the Priorities Statement.

5. How about activities not reflected in the Priorities Statement?

Only limited resources may be available for activities that are only distantly related to the priorities. When we began this process, Friends recognized that choices needed to be made to better focus the work of the Yearly Meeting and to reconcile the Yearly Meeting to the Spirit and Life of Friends in their monthly meetings. We understood that “we will need also to discern which facets of this work are primary, which are secondary or even tertiary, and which may need to be laid down, at least for a while.” (Minute 2011-04-33.) In implementing the priorities, Yearly Meeting committees will be asked to discern how their work impacts and furthers the leadings approved in the Priorities Statement. Nonetheless, Friends also directed that care be taken to assure that we remain open and receptive to “emerging leadings” and that we enable them to “flourish.” (Minute 2011-04-33.)

6. What are the primary leadings identified in the Priorities Statement?

The Priorities Statement will focus the Yearly Meeting on serving our community of meetings and Friends, within the limits of our financial and human resources, in the following areas:

- (1) Programs to teach and share our spiritual skills with each other, and to help meetings to revitalize themselves.**
- (2) Programs to help sustain our monthly meetings financially and to increase membership.**
- (3) Activities to increase contact and spiritual relationship among Friends.**
- (4) Resources to assist meetings in teaching our children, youth and young adults the substance of our faith and practice, and actions to better integrate them into the fabric of our community.**
- (5) Active support of Friends’ faith, values, ministry and witness in the world.**

The Priorities Statement also proposes steps to make the Yearly Meeting more transparent in its operations and more fully accountable to its members, particularly in the Yearly Meeting’s budget setting process and financial reporting. Finally, the Priorities Statement proposes “an ongoing assessment process designed to encourage us to remain faithful to our leadings” (Minute 2011-04-39) through an expanded Financial Services Committee and re-affirmation of the Committee’s responsibility and authority both (i) to evaluate proposed activities and expenditures in light of the stated priorities and leadings of the Yearly Meeting and (ii) to make necessary funding decisions in light of our priorities and the limits of our financial means.

The Priorities Statement describes these priorities and accountability measures in detail. It also includes a series of actions that will be taken in the first year to begin implementing the priorities and a vision of how the Yearly Meeting can be transformed over five years if we act faithfully to implement our collective leadings.