

## **Meeting for Discernment, February 26, 2011**

### **Threads from the Day and Recommendations to NYYM**

Part of the hope in establishing the Meetings for Discernment was that Friends engaged in the work of the Yearly Meeting committees could hear concerns and needs coming directly from monthly meetings and worship groups, and that the committees could then consider how to respond to what they heard.

Below are some common threads to the messages at the Plainfield Meeting for Discernment, the names of meetings about which these were shared, and some recommendations from the Meeting for Discernment steering committee to NYYM committees arising from each of the threads. We know that the meetings listed are not alone. Not all meetings had someone present; some people who had registered cancelled due to snow and for other reasons; and some who were present were not moved speak.

#### **MEETING FOR WORSHIP – WHAT DRAWS US TOGETHER**

One Friend spoke for many in saying that the experience of gathered worship is “what makes me keep coming back.” Friends spoke of their meetings having mid-week and extended worship, of seeking welcoming words to introduce worship to newcomers, and of trying new times and ways of including children in worship that have proven nourishing to all.

Chappaqua (children enter at end)

Conscience Bay (meeting for reverence)

Manhasset (individuals transferring in revived inactive meeting)

Rochester (moved time for Religious Ed, “Meeting for Learning” instead of “First Day School”)

Poplar Ridge (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday worship for all ages)

Plainfield (mid-week & extended worship)

**Recommendation to NYYM:** Ask the Communications Committee to work with interested Friends in creating a central location for meetings to log their experiences, what they tried and how it worked, where others can go to learn. Some of these activities could be jointly tracked/posted/linked to Ministry & Pastoral Care and Youth committees.

#### **MEETING FOR WORSHIP WITH ATTENTION TO BUSINESS**

Several Friends spoke of their meetings having corporately agreed to changes in ways of responding to conflict and in behavior and manner of conducting business, which led to new life of the meeting. In some meetings, Friends are struggling with old and new challenges. Several meetings spoke of recently involving children and youth in the meeting’s decision making.

Ithaca (prayer & talking about how make difficult decisions)

Chappaqua (simple guidelines)

New Brunswick (expansion preceded by years of struggle)

15<sup>th</sup> Street (passionate egos and property)

Rochester (Children’s Meeting for Business)

Plainfield (18 year-old clerk of Peace & Service, later joined meeting)

**Recommendation to NYYM:** We recommend that Conflict Transformation &/or some other committees document some of these cases: What was done? What worked? What didn’t? What resources are there to help meetings with corporate healing & individual healing? Some of the examples of youth involvement might be jointly tracked/circulated among both Ministry & Pastoral Care and Youth committees? Friends who were involved in these examples may well have some energy to put into their documentation.

## **SPIRITUAL NURTURE, COMMUNITY IN-REACH & SUPPORT**

Some Friends spoke of starting regular worship sharing groups and other small group activities aimed at building community by providing opportunities for sharing, including about personal faith beliefs. Children, or lack of them, are a joy & a concern. In other meetings, Friends spoke of having laid down activities that no longer had life. Some individuals spoke tentatively and some passionately about what they hold dear, about God, Christ, Truth, Love, Trust.

Plainfield (mid-week and extended)

Chappaqua (Sharing Circles)

Chatham-Summit (strong love & support & need for trust-building expressed)

Poughkeepsie (healing after loss)

Ithaca (several)

Morningside (beliefs)

Shrewsbury (no teachers or children for First Day School)

Manasquan (Seeking the Spirit – similar to QuakerQuest)

Bull's Head (building community always needs our attention and prayers)

Rochester (supporting statements of conscience, becoming more inclusive of all ages)

Scarsdale (some small groups continue, some laid down)

**Recommendation to NYYM:** Are there resources (in NYYM & beyond) for deepening as a faith community, for talking together about sensitive issues, that the Spiritual Nurture Working Group and/or Advancement committee can make known? Are there experiences they might want to gather? In particular, from those meetings engaged in talking about differing theologies? Under Nurture, could there be a blog or electronic bulletin board managed by the First Day School working group sharing resources, experiences?

## **OUTREACH, ADVANCEMENT & WIDER COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Friends spoke of their meeting and individuals experiencing new or renewed interest in speaking (with words and actions) about personal beliefs and our corporate manner of worshiping & doing business, and about how they and/or members of their meeting are involved in witness and community service. We were reminded that the work we do in the world can be a form of worship.

Manasquan (Seeking the Spirit program)

Chappaqua (guidelines for business and for speaking in meeting for worship)

Conscience Bay (outreach project for 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary)

New Brunswick (Friends Peace Teams)

Manhasset (Christian Coffee House)

Poughkeepsie (statement on marriage policy)

Rochester (statements of conscience, efforts to be more age inclusive)

Plainfield (community service)

Individuals: Don Badgley (Advancement), Paul Hamell (healing), Barbara Meli (spiritual fire),

Naomi Paz Greenberg (Conscientious Objection to Paying for War), Elizabeth Edminster (Truth)

**Recommendation to NYYM:** Are there experiences to be gathered here? Resources Advancement committee might make known? We need to nurture and hold accountable individuals who are gripped by passionate calls to ministry. Where can they turn if they feel that their meeting does not understand or wish to offer care, oversight, accountability or support? We need to offer structural support for emerging ministries.

## MEETING HOUSES & MEETING ROOMS

Friends from seven different meetings spoke about joys, excitement and challenges that their meetings were experiencing regarding their buildings. These meetings were in different stages of exploring, executing and living into construction, renovation, expansion, and other changes to their meetinghouses and meeting places.

Cornwall (considering building project)

Morningside (didn't initiate move into new room, but glad for it)

New Brunswick (has started work on expansion)

Ithaca (purchased and remodeling old restaurant after decades of struggle)

Manhasset (repairs & opening space to community)

Shrewsbury (renovations on early 19<sup>th</sup> century building)

Scarsdale (remodeled 20<sup>th</sup> century meetinghouse)

Chappaqua (rotten foundation on 18<sup>th</sup> century building repaired last year)

15<sup>th</sup> Street (wonderful things can happen if labor in the Spirit – if not, property can tear us apart)

**Recommendation to NYYM:** Ask the Communications Committee, with the help of interested Friends and support from GSCC, to create a central location for meetings to log their experiences, what they tried and how it worked – a place where others can go to learn information about buildings, historical renovation experts & fundraising (including sources of funds within and outside the yearly meeting). A blog? Might there be a need/interest in a program on Meeting finances?

## THE POWER OF PRAYER & ASKING FOR HELP

Individual Friends and meeting appointees spoke of the sometimes transformative results, when they and/or their meetings asked for help and spiritual guidance: whether from God through prayer, asking to be held in the light by others, or seeking guidance and support from wise & experienced Quaker “elders.” Several asked for the body to hold their meetings in the light.

Chappaqua (guidance for M&C and meeting)

Manasquan (drew on advancement experiences of others to create own outreach program)

Manhasset (quarterly meeting visitors to dwindling meeting ended up transferring in & reviving)

Ithaca (requested & felt empowered by prayers from last winter's Meeting for Discernment)

Rochester (asked to be held in light)

Cornwall (asked for good wishes in meeting with architect)

Bulls Head (building community needs both attention and prayers)

Individuals: Paul Hamell, Irene Goodman

### ***The Meetings for Discernment Steering Committee:***

*Janet Hough (clerk, Chappaqua), Ann Davidson (Farmington), Lu Harper (Rochester), Carolyn Emerson (Conscience Bay), Elizabeth Edminster (15<sup>th</sup> Street), Roger Dreisbach-Williams (Rahway/Plainfield), Heather Cook (Chatham-Summit; NYYM clerk), Christopher Sammond (Bulls Head-Oswego/Poplar Ridge; NYYM General Secretary)*

### ***Coordinating Committee Representatives to Meetings for Discernment:***

*Regina Haag (Adirondack; Ministry) & Amy Willauer-Obermayer (Binghamton; Ministry), Ron Peterson (Fredonia; General Services), Cheshire Frager (Flushing; Nurture), Naomi Paz Greenberg (Flushing; Witness)*