

## **PRIORITIES SUPPORT WORKING GROUP**

### **Report to Summer Sessions 2018**

I'm happy to be able to share with you how our working group sees the progress we as a yearly meeting are making toward living into the priorities approved in 2015. In some areas, we have seen a great deal of growth, and some areas need raised awareness and attention. I have listed each of the Priorities, noted the progress the working group has seen, and where we feel more work is needed.

**We envision a yearly meeting deeply grounded in the practice of our faith.** The focus for deepening our faith and practice is mainly in our monthly meetings. This is supplemented by the Meetings for Discernment, weekends at Powell House, and the work of the Committee on Conflict Transformation and the Spiritual Nurture Working Group. Having Whisper Buddies in yearly meeting business sessions helps to deepen understanding of our business practice. We are pleased that the practice of having elders ground business sessions has become well established.

**We envision a yearly meeting made up of strong, vital monthly meetings.** The State of the Society report gives a picture of our monthly meetings. Many are seeing decreasing membership, and lack of Friends to carry on the usual traditions. Some meetings are growing, and experiencing the challenges that come with growth. Many of our monthly meetings have only a limited sense of connection to the yearly meeting. Some of the communications from the yearly meeting are not clear and compelling. Some meetings are not aware of the resources that the yearly meeting has to offer. More work needs to be done to resolve the disconnect between the yearly meeting and monthly meetings.

The Outreach Working Group was made up of two Friends who in 2016 felt called to nourish the growing interest in outreach. They worked with 15 monthly meetings on ways to do more effective outreach and welcoming the people who were attracted by their efforts. Although the original working group has been disbanded, their work goes on.

**We envision a yearly meeting gathered into one body.** This vision needs more attention. We need to increase intervisitation, and Friends worshipping with other monthly meetings.

Staff and clerks are the yearly meeting leadership, not separate entities that function on their own. It seems that many yearly meeting committees are doing important work, news about that work often seems to stay within the committee.

Although Friends not on the committee may seek out their work by reading Advance Reports, little is known about that work beyond the committee itself. How can we become more aware of the Spirit-led work that is happening?

One of the concerns of the working group is that many of our documents are written at a college reading level. We ask Friends to be sensitive to this so that our children, youth, young adults and others, including those for whom English is not their first language, are not excluded when simpler text will serve. We understand the Committee to Revise Faith & Practice is considering this concern as they work on revisions.

**We envision a yearly meeting that nurtures our children, youth and young adults.** When we had field secretaries whose focus was on these age groups, we made some progress. Not having those staff members has meant additional work for other staff when that is possible, and meant that some things just don't get done

Intergenerational worship has become a reality in some monthly meetings, and during our morning community worship at Summer Sessions. Young adults use technology to stay connected, and to learn from different points of view. The yearly meeting has begun to tap into this resource.

**We envision a yearly meeting that supports and amplifies our witness.** Indian Affairs committee had brought to several of our Sessions a report about the original inhabitants on the land where we were meeting.

Our attendance at the White Privilege Conference in 2016 (?) was remarkable. A number of Friends continue to work with us to overcome our white privilege and racism.

Friends who are actively witnessing receive support from their local meetings and beyond. The last sentence under this vision states: "*We, the Body of Friends gathered through our New York Yearly Meeting, recognize as a Priority for the Yearly Meeting the responsibility to be an active voice for Friends' faith, value, ministry and witness in the world, and to support Friends active witness.*" How can our witness become more visible in the yearly meeting and the world?

**We envision a yearly meeting that is accountable and transparent.** This is an area where we have made significant progress! The Trustees and our treasurers have simplified our finances to a point where we will be able to conduct an audit in the next year or two. The treasurer's reports that come to Sessions are easily understandable. We have a much better idea of what financial resources we have and how they can be accessed. Congratulations to the Trustees and the treasurers.

This concludes the Priorities. Now a closing comment.

The Priorities did not mention nurturing our older people. The ARCH program has expanded so that many of our monthly meetings have at least one active ARCH volunteer. ARCH Local Coordinators provide local support for people, meetings and ARCH volunteers. The Local Coordinators reduce the need for extended travel in order to support Friends in our aging community.

You may have noticed other ways that we are living into the priorities. You may also have noticed areas where changes could be made to move us closer to the yearly meeting envisioned by the Leadings and Priorities Working Group. Please share these things with us this week, both informally and during our meeting.

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Callie Janoff 7/20/18 2:04 PM

**Comment [1]:** This sounds to me like a B- and I would give us more like a C- and that mostly for good intention. Not having those staff members has meant additional work for other staff when we can, and other things just going undone.

My sense is that the work was well begun, and needs more attention than we are currently giving it.