

Advance Report
Steve Mohlke, General Secretary

A year ago, as I looked forward to being general secretary, I worried about the commute to New York City from Ithaca; I imagined visiting lots of meetings, including prison worship groups; and I thought that all I needed to know about reimbursement payment vouchers was how to fill out the form.

It turns out that there are several express busses between Ithaca and NYC with wifi on board. Given the volume of email I receive, being constrained to a seat with a laptop and wifi for several hours every other week is highly productive. It turns out that I was able to visit one to two meetings per month and at that rate it will take me more than four years to get to all the monthly meetings. It turns out that I didn't visit a prison worship group because getting approval to enter New York State prisons takes a long time and even having a visit scheduled doesn't mean the Department of Corrections will allow it to happen. It turns out that I had to learn nearly everything there is to know about the NYYM voucher payment system in order to help our treasurers and staff streamline and improve it. And it became clear that my work falls into three general categories: staff, our yearly meeting committee activities, and connecting with local meetings.

I find our staff remarkable. Broadly, I think a central role we play as staff is to support the work of our yearly meeting which is a largely volunteer organization. Helen is our associate secretary and has been with us for twenty-seven years. Very few people know in any detail all that she does on our behalf. For example, as I overhear her on the phone with people registering for Summer Sessions, I realize that she is catching and solving dozens of problems in advance that would otherwise not be noticed until we arrive at Sessions. In addition to running the office, supervising three other staff members, helping me find my way, and shepherding our Spring, Summer and Fall Sessions, she also picks up critical tasks when volunteers can't do them.

Walter, our administrative associate, is as steady and detail-oriented as human beings come and exactly the person we need to handle all those routine tasks critical to an office such as recordkeeping, payment processing, etc. Sarah, our communications director, ably takes the lead on our publications by tracking down content, editing it, managing deadlines and publishing everything from InfoShare and *Spark* to our yearbook, sessions advance documents, and *Faith & Practice*. Chad's stated job as digital communications director is primarily to manage our website and help monthly meetings with theirs. In addition, he has become our all-around office support for all things technical. Callie not only does all the things needed to direct the ARCH (Aging Resources, Consultation, and Help) program with vision, skill and grace, she draws us all, staff and volunteers, into harmony with her persistent message that we are all together in this work. During Melinda's time on staff as our children and youth field secretary, she brought tremendous gifts in Quaker religious education and helped others discover their gifts. Having left her staff position, Melinda remains as a consultant working with the meetings in the Vital Meetings Partner Project. As our interim young adult field secretary, Emily brought her wealth of talent, including her "internet-to-meetinghouse pipeline" skills. Since she left, that position has not been filled. The Personnel Committee is bringing a recommendation to Summer Sessions that we combine these two part time positions into one full time position with benefits and further support our yearly meeting priority on children, youth and young adults with some part time local coordinator positions.

Watch for an opportunity to meet and greet our staff during Summer Sessions. I bring my gifts with technology to this team. I see one of my roles as finding ways to use technology to make their tasks and our collaboration smoother and stronger. We've been

making better use of Calendar, Docs and Groups from Google Suite. We've been improving our online security. We just started using Slack for intra-office communication and we've begun a transition to a different database for some office operations. We've been working together with our treasurer to streamline the process for requesting payment with vouchers by enabling electronic submission and approval.

As general secretary, I've been participating in quite a few committees and projects of our yearly meeting. I've been working with the Personnel Committee, the Development Committee, Liaison Committee, the Meeting for Discernment Steering Committee, the Pay As Led Working Group, the Outreach Working Group, the treasurers, and the yearly meeting clerk and assistant clerk. I've participated in workshops on conflict transformation, racism, pastoral care and more. I've been working on two major documents, the Personnel Manual and NYYM's Financial Guidelines, that are written by committee and have an impact on staff. I view these documents as important to the smooth and transparent functioning of our yearly meeting.

My visits to local meetings have been meaningful and engaging. I've been to some of our more distant meetings from Western New York to Long Island. It is rewarding to join different communities for worship and conversation and to learn how Spirit works through each of them. It's important for me to keep these learnings with me as I help connect people from around our yearly meeting who help each other in strengthening our local meetings.

As I enter year two, I look forward to finding more ways to use technology to improve our processes without crowding out discernment and Spirit. I look forward to examining how we make decisions together with attention to how people are included and excluded. I look forward to working through the details of implementing Pay as Led in a way that strengthens our community so that we are less about charity and more about balance. I look forward to additional visits with local meetings. I look forward to my first visit to one of our eight prison worship groups. I look forward to exploring challenging topics together as Spirit calls us into them.