

REPORT OF THE PRIORITIES WORKING GROUP

Summer Sessions 2012

At the spring sessions of 2011, the Yearly Meeting created the Priorities Working Group, which has now been working joyfully and productively for over a year. The group meets once monthly by conference call and quarterly in person, in various locations. The charge to the group is to visit every meeting in the Yearly Meeting; the purpose is "to gather the sense of the monthly and regional meetings and of individual Friends" as to two questions: how is the Spirit at work among us? Where is it leading us as a Society of Friends in the immediate future? With the information we gather from our meeting visits, the Priorities Working Group will create a statement of leadings and priorities for the Yearly Meeting. Thus as you can see, intervisitation is the heart of what we do. If you join us on one of our visits, you will know the joy we feel in contacting so many Friends.

The charge to gather the sense of a meeting has meant that we visit local meetings. When we can, the group transacts its business on Friday evening and Saturday; then some members visit with a meeting near by on the Sunday. In the fifteen months since the group was created, we have visited Poplar Ridge, Montclair, Dover-Randolph, New Brunswick, Shrewsbury-Plainfield, Matinecock, Central Finger Lakes, and Rochester Monthly Meetings. We have also visited four worship groups: Cayuga, Sing Sing, Auburn, and Attica. When everyone in a local meeting, however small, has a chance to be heard, and to hear about the work of the Yearly Meeting, the group begins to get a comprehensive view of the priorities of the largest number of Friends. Thereby we hope to encourage closer connection between the Yearly Meeting's committee structure and the needs and hopes of local Friends. But our charge also says that the Working Group may communicate with regional meetings, and in fact there have been two visits to larger groupings. One was to Purchase Quarter, where some Friends asked for a presentation on the work of the Yearly Meeting. It was well attended. The other Quarterly Meeting visit was to Nine Partners, which met this year at Cornwall and invited the Priorities Working Group to make a presentation there. Thirty-five Friends attended, representing four of that quarter's six constituent meetings. Following up these larger presentations, all these local meetings will be asked to invite the group to visit them separately. More visits are being planned for coming months.

In all these visits, we focus on two queries: How is the Spirit alive in your Monthly Meeting? What work, ministry, witness is your Meeting called to? Friends may ask, What answers have you received so far and what have you learned about our priorities? On the one hand, we might say we have received so many diverse answers to our queries that they can't be summarized. On the other hand, common concerns are emerging. Many groups of Friends are concerned about making our peace testimony more visible, about too many Friends being over-committed, about their young people, and about their members aging. Since we have several dozen more monthly meetings to visit, we expect to keep learning more about Friends' priorities.

There is another set of priorities we are working on. We appointed a subcommittee on the governance of the Yearly Meeting, which has been studying how to facilitate the process of decision-making and budget-making so as to ensure that the spiritual leadings of the body are

effectively and efficiently reflected in the priorities of financial planning. We expect to bring a recommendation on governance before you at a future session.

Please join us. More Friends are needed to discern our priorities, before the Priorities Working Group is laid down. Although the minutes in spring 2011 required certain Friends to serve, so as to insure broad representation, no formal nomination procedure is required for you to be part of our visits to monthly meetings. Please join us.