

New York Yearly Meeting
Spring Sessions
April 4–6, 2008

Oakwood Friends School, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Saturday, April 5, 2008

Ernestine Buscemi, Clerk
Lee Haring, Assistant Clerk
Karen Reixach, Recording Clerk
Jeffrey Aaron, Reading Clerk

2008-04-01. The Meeting gathered. Lee Haring (Bulls Head-Oswego), assistant clerk, called the roll, asking Friends to rise by regional meeting.

2008-04-02. The meeting settled into worship. Out of the silence the reading clerk read from our Yearly Meeting Faith & Practice on meeting for worship with a concern for business which invites Friends to seek the Spirit and advises on ways that promote the authority of God's Spirit. Friends settled again into silent, expectant waiting.

2008-04-03. Ernestine Buscemi (Morningside), clerk of NYYM, introduced the individuals at the clerks' table. She began the business session by providing background to Friends on the outcome of the closing of the McCutchen, the establishment of the Friends Foundation for the Aging who hold the funds from the sale of the building, and the work of the Working Group on Aging, which is under the care of Nurture. Nurture Coordinating Committee recommends that the Working Group on Aging become the Committee on Aging Concerns. Anita Paul (Schenectady) and Barbara Spring (sojourning at Albany Meeting from Missoula Meeting [North Pacific YM]) described the needs assessment process of creating pilot program in the Albany area, called Aging Resources, Consultation, and Help or ARCH. ARCH works to bring appropriate resources to help seniors, their caregivers and meetings, to identify the seniors' needs, to find the agencies and people to meet those needs, and to serve as facilitators between caregivers and their parents. Resource people are viewed as "enabled volunteers" and paid as consultants. Anita and Barbara presently serve as the enabled volunteers. Barbara indicated that they may also take on other activities, such as developing workshops.

Anita then read the handbook description of the proposed Committee on Aging Concerns. The Operating Budget currently contains \$750 in the Section expenses for the Working Group. This amount would become a specific line for the Committee on Aging Concerns to be used for committee expenses.

2008-04-04. Friends approved the creation of the Committee on Aging Concerns, in the Nurture Section. The Meeting then approved Yearly Meeting immediately setting up a fund line under the management of the Yearly Meeting treasurer to receive, hold, and disburse funds from the Friends Foundation on Aging. This fund will be under the care of Committee on Aging Concerns.

2008-04-05. Christine DeRoller (Old Chatham), Youth Program codirector of Powell House, reported for the Powell House Committee. Since April 2007 Powell House hosted 75 events for spiritual renewal and connection with 2,500 attendees. The Youth Program has added weekends, using eight young adults as leaders. Major maintenance projects at Pitt Hall included reroofing the garage, buying new chairs for the dining room, and repairing and refinishing the wood floor. Powell House Committee is considering the staff recommendation that the renovations to the Anna Curtis Center at Powell House begin this summer. Phase One would make the back of Anna Curtis Center (Bugg House) more accessible and reduce allergy-producing mold. Chris indicated that a substantial portion of the funds needed for the renovations are in hand, and invited Friends to contribute to the capital fund to ensure that the remaining needs are met. Friends received the report.

2008-04-06. Susan Bingham (Montclair), Treasurer of NYYM, summarized the 2007 fiscal year and the financial picture as of February 29, 2008. Friends received the report.

2008-04-07. Christopher Sammond (sojourning at Bulls Head-Oswego), general secretary of New York Yearly Meeting, indicated that his written report, posted on the Yearly Meeting Web site (www.nyyym.org/pubs), offers some examples of how the staff support us as we build the blessed community. He reminded us of the areas of focus he identified two years ago: care of our children and youth, integration of newcomers, spiritual nurture/religious education, conflict resolution, coming to a common vision, and healing the divide between our monthly meetings and the structure of the Yearly Meeting. He feels that there has been real progress. Christopher then reflected on three themes: the recognition of how “generations” of Friends within a meeting plays out, and how that impedes our life and growth; what we might learn from wrestling with our relationship with the rest of FUM to become more aware of the thoughts and emotions which move us towards hardening our hearts to our fellow human beings, and how we can learn to keep our hearts open, even while emphatically disagreeing with the premises and conclusions of those we differ from; how our use of electronic communication affects us as a community, positively and corrosively.

Friends received the report and ministry of our general secretary, with a sense that we are to get out of our comfort zone and engage with these issues in our meetings and in our lives.

2008-04-08. Frederick Dettmer (Purchase), clerk of Witness Coordinating Committee, introduced Jens Braun (Old Chatham), clerk of the Committee on Conscientious Objection to Paying for War, who provided background on the WCC recommendation that the Yearly Meeting approve publication by Pendle Hill of the Amicus Brief submitted by NYYM to the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Jenkins v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue*. Friends approved submitting the Amicus Brief to Pendle Hill for publication.

2008-04-09. Friends also approved that Jens Braun, Dan Jenkins, and Karen Reixach serve as a writing team to prepare a framing piece, negotiate the scope of any condensation of the brief, work with the attorneys to ensure that the pamphlet is faithful to the arguments in the brief, and review the draft with the clerk of the Yearly Meeting and the general secretary before submission to Pendle Hill. All revisions requested by Pendle Hill will be prepared by the writing team and reviewed and approved by the clerk and general secretary.

2008-04-10. The reading clerk read Minute 2007-07-50 from Summer Sessions calling on Friends to prepare Statements of Conscience on Paying for War. Jens Braun reported that the Call has gone out to meetings in NYYM and other Yearly Meetings. He described the work of listening to the Spirit and reflecting that in our lives.

Witness Coordinating Committee recommends extending the Call to Friends to Prepare Statements of Conscience approved at 2007 Summer Sessions to others (such as Mennonites and Brethren) and publicizing it more widely in the media. In consultation with the clerk of NYYM, the Committee on Conscience Objection to Paying for War would be asked to appropriately revise the Call for publication to others, to identify bodies to which the Call will be sent, and to provide assistance with distribution.

The Committee on Conscientious Objection to Paying for War was asked to further refine the minute and provide additional information on the Call.

2008-04-11. The minutes were approved.

2008-04-12. The meeting closed with silent worship.

Oakwood Friends School, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Sunday, April 6, 2008

Ernestine Buscemi, Clerk
Lee Haring, Assistant Clerk
Elaine Learnard, Recording Clerk
Norma Ellis, Reading Clerk

2008-04-13. The meeting opened in silent worship. Out of the silence, the reading clerk read the 2007 Epistle from Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting.

2008-04-14. The Clerk introduced those at the clerks' table. She spoke of our still sitting together in "that wonderful place we created yesterday" and asked us to hold that place and be together in peace, knowing that time is spacious where God is.

2008-04-15. The Clerk introduced Greta Mickey (Central Finger Lakes), clerk of the Peace Concerns Committee, and Fred Dettmer, clerk of Witness Coordinating Committee. Greta spoke of the difficulty of asking for the laying down of the Peace Concerns Committee. She spoke of how this Yearly Meeting is doing work for peace in monthly meetings and in fifteen separate committees. WCC has asked her to serve as the coordinator for peace concerns and to assist monthly meetings in networking on peace-concerns work. WCC recommended that, as the work of peacemaking in New York Yearly Meeting is strong, and there is insufficient energy among Friends to live into the specific charge of the Peace Concerns Committee, the NYYM Peace Concerns Committee should be laid down. Friends approved laying down the Peace Concerns Committee.

2008-04-16. Fred reported that WCC recommended the following minute: that all general bequests to the Sharing Fund shall be held separate from general contributions to the Sharing Fund pending discernment by Witness Coordinating Committee on the best uses to be made of the bequests. Such bequests shall be deposited with the accounts of the New York Yearly Meeting trustees or, at the trustees' discretion, in a separate line item in the Sharing Fund, until the clerk of the Witness Coordinating Committee, in consultation with the NYYM trustees, proposes a plan for the management and administration of each specific bequest. Friends approved.

2008-04-17. The Clerk noted that we would next have a report from the Friends United Meeting (FUM) representatives. She spoke about the intent of the Yearly Meeting to stay engaged in the extended and sometimes frustrating conversation, even as our NYYM representatives continue in active dialogue with FUM on our behalf. She asks us to hold the written materials offered and go back to our meetings where meaningful discernment can take place so that we may hear each other when we come together again at Summer Session. She introduced Christopher Sammond, who brought an oral report as one of the three representatives from NYYM to General Board of FUM. [The NYYM representatives are Christopher Sammond, Carol Holmes (Brooklyn), and Richard Goodman (Westbury).]

Christopher told us that they have heard anguish and deep distress and heart-felt exchanges on the current concerns over the sexual ethics portion of the FUM personnel policy and related issues. They have come to understand there is a need for more regular reports and better communication so that Friends throughout the Yearly Meeting can be aware of the delicate work they are doing. They see the FUM Board being significantly polarized. They understand the impasse in FUM, as described by Johan Maurer, a former FUM general secretary, as a sort of "proxy battleground" for yearly meetings that are struggling with diversity in theology and culture. They have felt the need to stop and wait but equally to build relationships of trust with all parties, finding common ground where possible, so that when there is discussion of more difficult issues, parties don't fly to opposite poles. Christopher pointed to the FUM General Board minute of October 2007, which denied hatred and violence toward any and all persons and was a direct response to the homophobic remarks made at the Board meeting in Kakamega, [Kenya] as one fruit of their efforts at building bridges across some of the divides. They have been able to argue effectively against attempts to further institutionalize homophobic policies without exacerbating the existing polarization. He noted that in many of the conversations they have witnessed in this yearly meeting about the conflicts within FUM, they have seen that partial and inaccurate information has served to exacerbate an already inflammatory topic. To help us all in our discernment on how to be in relationship with the rest of FUM, they have assembled a number of documents on the NYYM Web site, under the Nurture section, in two places. One is under the heading Friends United Meeting, and the other under Minutes on Gender Issues. Further information (including the full text of the FUM representatives' report to Spring Sessions) will be added to the Web site, as it emerges. Friends can also get hard copies of this information by calling the NYYM office. Friends are asked to read these materials so that they can bring informed hearts and minds to our discernment. Friends received this report.

2008-04-18 The reading clerk read the travel minute for Nadine Hoover (Alfred) that was endorsed by Alfred Monthly Meeting, Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting, and NYYM in 2005. Nadine reported on her work under this minute, thanking everyone for all the support she has received. The Conscience Studio Web site [www.consciencestudio.com] has much information about her work in the U.S. The Indonesian AVP work has been taken under the care of Friends Peace Teams. Nadine is working on translating information about Quakerism and the Conscience Studio work into Indonesian. She read a letter from Halimatun Sakdiah, one of the women whose college education is being supported through Nadine's work in Indonesia, who expressed her sense that she is "the lucky person" and her joy and excitement about what she is learning, her chance to study beauty and her opportunities to bring back her education to the kindergarten school in her village of Jaring Halus. Friends received this report.

2008-04-19. Tim Johnson brought a report from the nominating committee:

Corrections and Nominations

Friends United Meeting Triennial, Class of 2008

Replace Irene Goodman (Westbury) with Richard Goodman (Westbury)

National Religious Campaign against Torture, Class of 2010

Resigned: Mara Komoska ('07) (Brooklyn)

Nominated: Patricia Chernoff (Morningside)

Corrections and Resignations Noted

Nominating Committee

Listed in error, from Farmington-Scipio: Marilyn Ray (Ithaca)

Resigned, from Nine Partners: Mary Williams (Bulls Head-Oswego)

Sessions Committee, Class of 2010

Resigned: Charley Flint (Rahway-Plainfield MM)

Witness Coordinating Committee, Class of 2008

Resigned: Judith Fetterley (Albany)

Friends approved these nominations and revisions.

2008-04-20. The consent agenda was presented for approval.

A. Friends approved the laying down of the Spiritual Nurture Committee under the care of the Ministry Coordinating Committee. The work will continue as the Spiritual Nurture Working Group discerns needs for spiritual growth, support, and accountability within NYYM as Friends move through the stages of their spiritual journeys.

B. Friends approved the laying down of the United Society of Friends Women Committee. Nurture Coordinating Committee recommended laying down this committee as the work of USFW is being done at monthly meetings.

C. Friends approved moving the New Jersey Council of Churches and the New York State Council of Churches Collegium to the Witness Coordinating Committee. Nurture Coordinating Committee recommended this move because the representatives to these ecumenical bodies help broaden our connections to the wider Christian community and the support and focus of the WCC will assist in this endeavor.

2008-04-21. The Clerk told us that her heart and her feet leapt in joy to be with the very many Friends who gathered in worship at the first Meeting for Discernment held in Rochester on March 15, 2008. She introduced assistant clerk Lee Haring, clerk for the Meeting for Discernment, who read a report on the meeting. The day began with extended worship, longer than many had experienced before, through which we came to know each other in that which is eternal. Lee expressed the belief, shared by many, that this is a growing force that will draw others to future Meetings for Discernment. People spoke the discernment of their meetings, their general impressions from regions or quarters, and out of their own individual discernment. Lee reported that there were seventy-two attenders from thirty-six meetings and worship groups present for the day.

The permanent Steering Committee was appointed for the Meetings for Discernment. The members are: Naomi Paz Greenberg (Flushing), Greta Mickey (Central Finger Lakes), Anne Pomeroy (New Paltz), Rebekah Tanner (Quaker Street and Syracuse), Deborah B. Wood (Purchase), Melanie-Claire Mallison (Ithaca), Frederick Dettmer (Purchase), Paula McClure (Montclair), and the clerk, assistant clerk, and general secretary of the Yearly Meeting.

The second Meeting for Discernment will be held Tuesday, July 22, 2008, at Silver Bay, with morning, afternoon, and evening set aside for the meeting, making it possible to alternate periods of worship with periods of speaking and listening. All Friends are always welcome at meetings for discernment.

2008-04-22. Peter Baily (Poughkeepsie), head of Oakwood School, spoke from the body, noting the school's pleasure in having us here and saying that we are always welcome, for committee work or larger sessions.

2008-04-23. The minutes of the session were read and approved.

2008-04-24. The meeting closed with silent worship.