

Handbook Page (proposed):
Meetings for Discernment
First Reading, Fall Sessions 2015

The Meetings for Discernment are an ongoing experiment of the Yearly Meeting. At Summer Sessions, 2014, this experiment was minuted to continue through Summer Sessions, 2016.

Friends approve the extension of Meetings for Discernment for an additional six years, at the end of which Friends will consider how and whether Meetings for Discernment are serving Spirit's purpose for New York Yearly Meeting. Two pages will be added to the New York Yearly Meeting Handbook: one for Meetings for Discernment and one for the Meetings for Discernment Steering Committee.

2014-07-24

History: Before there was a formal Religious Society of Friends, Friends gathered in Second Day Meetings for fellowship and to support one another in discerning leadings of the Spirit. In New York Yearly Meeting, a body was formed called the Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders, which became the Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Counsel (YMMC) in 1955. The YMMC met annually to discern and seek clearness for leadings and to support the ministry of its members. The executive body of the YMMC was called the Coordinating Committee for Ministry and Counsel (CCMC). In July 2007, at the recommendation of the Transition Working Group, the YMMC was suspended and replaced by Meetings for Discernment, to be held at least twice yearly with three charges: to help strengthen connections between Monthly Meetings and the Yearly Meeting; to support individual leadings; and to help discern emerging directions within the Yearly Meeting. At the same time, the Coordinating Committee for Ministry and Counsel was restructured, with a change in name to Ministry Coordinating Committee and with the establishment of appropriate committees under its care (see NYYM minute 2007-07-38).

Functions and Activities

- Connect the body of the Yearly Meeting through extended worship, allowing time for deep listening for the movement of Spirit among us, without the constraints of agendas.
- Provide opportunities for Friends to be nourished by deeply grounded worship and moved by inspiring vocal and silent ministry, often around queries formulated by the Meetings for Discernment Steering Committee
- Serve as a body to listen to what is rising within our Monthly Meetings, sharing concerns, cares, and leadings
- Discern the presence and movement of God, Spirit, the Light, in our hearts and in the Yearly Meeting as a whole.

- Help weave together the work of Friends active in the different Meetings and Regions of New York Yearly Meeting, enabling them to build strong, vital monthly and regional meetings
- Consider issues that transcend the scope of any individual Monthly Meeting or Yearly Meeting section
- Make recommendations to appropriate Yearly Meeting committees, or to the Yearly Meeting as a whole, communicating rising issues to the Yearly Meeting body
- Hold ourselves accountable for the accomplishment of the above functions and activities.

Organization: The Meetings for Discernment are organized by a Steering Committee, which functions as a facilitating body (see Meetings for Discernment Steering Committee handbook page). The committee clerk is appointed by the Steering Committee. The Assistant Clerk of the Yearly Meeting may be asked to serve as clerk. Recorders are asked to take notes, which the Steering Committee uses to produce reports and recommendations. Elders (invited by the Steering Committee or others) from throughout the yearly meeting serve by grounding and holding the body in prayer and in the Light.

Method of Appointment: Each local Meeting and Worship Group appoints one or two members, Friends who are well seasoned in the life of their Meeting, to participate in the Meetings for Discernment. For continuity and growth in this Yearly Meeting body, three-year terms are recommended. Friends may be reappointed for a second consecutive three-year term. At their discretion, Monthly Meetings may choose to make appointments for shorter periods of time. Meetings are encouraged to report names of appointees promptly to the clerk of the Steering Committee and to the NYYM office for inclusion in the NYYM Yearbook and data base.

In addition to the named appointees, the Meetings for Discernment are open to all who wish to attend. The Clerk of the Yearly Meeting, the Assistant Clerk and the General Secretary attend the Meetings for Discernment and serve as ex-officio members of its Steering Committee. The clerks of all Yearly Meeting Coordinating committees (or named representatives) are encouraged to attend gatherings of the Meetings for Discernment and the Steering Committee.

Meeting Times and Places: Meetings for Discernment are held at least twice a year, once between Fall and Spring sessions and once during summer sessions, subject to continuing discernment of the needs of the Yearly Meeting. The winter Meetings for Discernment are held in meeting houses in different parts of the Yearly Meeting to encourage involvement of Friends who may not otherwise participate in Yearly Meeting-wide activities.

Finances: The Yearly Meeting operating budget provides money for administrative and travel expenses for appointees from Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups, and for those serving the Meetings for Discernment. These funds are provided through an operating budget line for the Meetings for Discernment and administered by the Steering Committee.