

Handbook Page (proposed): Meetings for Discernment Second Reading at Fall Sessions 2016

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, 2020. All Friends are invited to participate.

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 vocal and silent ministry, around queries discerned by the Meetings for Discernment Steering Committee.
- Discern the presence and movement of God, Spirit, the Light, in our hearts and in the Yearly Meeting as a whole.
- Provide a worshipful forum for hearing how Spirit is moving in other Friends and Meetings in ways that may speak to, inform or inspire us.
- Worship together to hold issues that seek the care of the Yearly Meeting body.
- Serve as a body to increase our capacity to listen for and to discern rising ministry, concerns and leadings within our meetings.
- Gather to share our search for guidance and greater faithfulness to help build stronger and more vital meetings.

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). Recorders are asked to take notes, which the Steering Committee uses for its work. Individual Friends from throughout the yearly meeting are invited to serve as Elders, grounding and holding the body in prayer and in the Light.

Meeting Representative Appointment: Each local Meeting and Worship Group is asked to appoint one or two 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 are asked to attend the Meetings for Discernment as are the clerks or named representatives of all Yearly Meeting Coordinating committees.

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 Steering Committee administers the budget line from the Yearly Meeting operating budget. These funds may be used to provide money for travel expenses for those serving the Meetings for Discernment and others as funds are available.