

PROGRESS ON PRIORITIES

In the summer of 2015, after a long process of listening to Friends in monthly meetings, New York Yearly Meeting approved six statements called “Leadings and Priorities.” These six statements are meant to guide the work of the yearly meeting organization, including committees and staff. This is the first of a series of articles reporting on the progress toward living into these priorities. The content is based on the observations of the Leadings and Priorities Support Working Group.

We would like to hear from Friends about other ways that the yearly meeting and monthly meetings are growing into the Priorities.

The first Priority is:

We envision a yearly meeting deeply grounded in the practice of our faith.

We have a clear sense from Friends that the core of all they do centers in their Meeting for Worship and their life as a community. In support of this, their primary focus, Friends seek help in spiritual deepening, in developing clerking skills, in understanding principles of meetings for business, in understanding the role of vocal ministry and afterthoughts, in practicing pastoral care and conflict transformation, in participation in first day school and adult religious education programs. We, the Body of Friends gathered through our New York Yearly Meeting, recognize as a Priority for the Yearly Meeting the development of programs to teach and share our spiritual skills with each other, and to help meetings to revitalize themselves.

As the Working Group considered this Priority at Summer Sessions, we felt strongly that as a yearly meeting we have a rising consciousness of the importance of eldering. Friends are often asked to fill traditional elders’ roles, sometimes without calling them elders or referring to the practice as eldering. Inviting someone to hold a business or committee meeting in prayer as an elder has become a common practice, at yearly meeting Sessions, at Meetings for Discernment, and in many other settings.

Our Young Adult Field Secretaries, Children and Youth Secretary, and Spiritual Nurture Working Group offer resources for spiritual deepening. The QuED days, the “Tending the Garden” series of workshops from the Spiritual Nurture Working Group, and young adult mini-retreats all contribute to grounding.

For high schoolers at Summer Sessions for the past two years, having ‘Whisper Buddies’ has been an opportunity to learn about our business practice and Quaker terminology. This year, some high schoolers added their presence to an entire morning business session. Also at Summer Sessions, Community Worship each morning offered many a variety of ideas for semi-programmed worship that includes Friends of all ages.

Jeffrey Aaron and Deb Wood developed an interest group for Summer Sessions on clerking. Although no one was able to attend, the sheet covering the workshop information is available from us, either electronically or by postal mail.

Over 100 Friends from many of our monthly meetings have joined a network of ARCH Visitors. They offer resources and pastoral care to Friends who are in their last third of life or living with a disability. ARCH is also for caregivers and for anyone in regular contact with aging Friends or Friends living with disabilities. ARCH visitors cultivate vulnerability and trust in our meeting communities, key components of grounded faithful meetings. The Committee on Conflict Transformation has workshops to help Friends in monthly meetings develop skills to transform conflict among individuals into opportunities for greater truth and deeper love. Friends on that committee are available to deal confidentially with conflicts within meetings.

Since Summer Sessions, we have heard that at least two monthly meetings are holding discussions an hour prior to worship. These have encouraged attenders to become more involved, and have deepened the worship. Brooklyn Meeting has started a Quaker Activism group “to explore how we as a community can better confront oppression, engage politically, and infuse light and love into the resistance of systemic injustice.” One event was held on a Saturday in May, with sessions led by a number of Friends from the meeting. Another event is planned.

We have made a start on living into the priority of being deeply grounded in our faith, but we have a long way to go! Although the yearly meeting has many resources that monthly meetings can use, many monthly meetings are either not aware of these resources or may feel that the resources are for someone else. Part of the vision when we approved living into these Priorities was to “envision a yearly meeting where there will no longer be ‘yearly meeting Friends’ and ‘monthly meeting Friends’ but rather one, whole yearly meeting devoted to faithfully living out the leadings of the Spirit.” Let us continue to work on this goal.

Deb Wood,
Clerk, Leadings & Priorities Support Working Group
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