

Minute clarifying the role of the clerk and general secretary in representing NYYM

The following proposed minute was given a first reading at Summer Sessions 2014 and will be brought forward for approval at Fall Sessions 2014 on Sunday, November 16.

MINUTE

The NYYM clerk and general secretary are expected to represent the Yearly Meeting.

Between sessions, when the occasion for giving the Yearly Meeting a public voice seems urgent and appropriate, the clerk and general secretary are expected to represent the Yearly Meeting's known stands, along with the testimonies of the wider body of the Religious Society of Friends.

Such occasions could include, but would not be limited to, joining with other organizations in joint statements or actions, signing onto *amicus curiae* briefs, signing petitions and letters of concern as an organization, sending letters of concern to other yearly meetings affected by wars, terrorism and natural disasters, and making time-critical comments to public officials.

The clerk and general secretary should confer with each other and be in accord before taking action. If one or the other is not available to confer, the clerk or general secretary should confer with the assistant clerk and/or associate secretary.

Whenever possible, they should anchor their comments in our faith as Friends, articulating how our speaking out is linked to our testimonies, our *Faith and Practice*, and past minutes approved by the Yearly Meeting, and they should use the resources of the Yearly Meeting's committee members and individuals known to share deeply the relevant concern. If necessary the clerk may call a special meeting of the Liaison Committee to aid in their discernment.

Furthermore, these Friends can ask an individual member to speak for the yearly meeting in a specific instance in which the individual can draw on her or his expertise in the relevant area of concern.

At the next session, the clerk and general Secretary are expected to report on such statements and actions they have taken in the interim between sessions. Their actions and joint statements with other bodies should be archived in the NYYM office. When either or both are instructed by a minute of the yearly meeting in session, they are expected to report how they have carried out the task. This follow up may be done in writing to the relevant committees and individuals or, if appropriate, by reporting at the next session.

This minute is intended to clarify, consolidate and reiterate policies and processes based on precedents and current review by the Liaison Committee.

HISTORY

In the wake of 9/11 in the midst of the national mobilization for war, many Friends, and the wider community of faith leaders, called upon the clerk to speak on behalf of the Yearly Meeting. Given how that disaster impacted us and our communities directly, Friends wanted some means for us to have a public voice in the wider body of Friends and in the world at large. Due to the length of time between our sessions, the Liaison Committee affirmed to the body its understanding that the clerk, if led after careful discernment, should speak on our behalf (minute 2002-12-22).

When we derived the job description for the general secretary, we chose to likewise include the duty of that person to speak on behalf of the Yearly Meeting. Subsequent to those actions, we saw the need to allow the clerk and general secretary to call on Friends with expertise in areas they lacked to serve in this capacity (minute 2008-11-06).

For the last ten years or so, the clerk and the general secretary have exercised this charge several times, whenever possible conferring with each other about a specific action before speaking out or signing onto a letter or petition. When it has not been possible due to one or the other being absent, the assistant clerk and associate secretary have been consulted prior to taking action. In the last few years, our clerks have been mindful to report those actions taken on behalf of the yearly meeting at a subsequent yearly meeting session.

Our current clerk reviewed the original affirming minute, and found it somewhat ambiguous and limited in scope, despite its application over the past years. The original minute only allowed for the clerk named at that time to speak for the Yearly Meeting to issues arising out of 9/11, and not to act, such as signing *amicus curiae* briefs or signing on as an organization to letters and petitions. The job description for the general secretary, framed less than two years later, asks that the general secretary “When necessary and appropriate, interpret the Religious Society of Friends to the wider community in statements and actions, including speaking to the press...”

Due to these ambiguities, our clerk brought this concern to the Liaison Committee, which recommended that the clerk and general secretary write a minute clarifying this practice, so that it could be brought to a session of the Yearly Meeting for consideration. In the same time period, the Priorities Working Group has heard a clear and consistent call for the yearly meeting to exercise a public voice on concerns vital to Friends.