

Leadings and Priorities Support Working Group

Summer Sessions Report 2016

During Summer Sessions 2014, we united as a body on a corporate vision in the form of a set of six priorities for the Yearly Meeting. The vision was the result of years of work by the former Priorities Working Group, visiting and listening across the Yearly Meeting. Responding to the recommendations was the purview of this gathered body, but it was not easy. By the end of summer sessions 2014, we had approved the priorities themselves, but not the implementation process that the Priorities Working Group proposed. And the PWG then requested to be laid down, which we agreed to do.

In 2015, Liaison Committee established a new body, the Leadings and Priorities Working Group, under its care, to keep an eye on how the body is doing, as a whole, in living up to these priorities, now that we had approved them. A major focus for the WG would be the Yearly Meeting's financial transparency and accountability, as well as our committee and staff structure. It was charged to report to the body at Summer Sessions, and this is our first report to you.

The eight of us (eight so far) had a hard time getting started. The charge we received did not feel quite right, and it took a while to figure out what needed to be tweaked. We wound up with a new charge with a different focus, which you can read in the advance reports, in the report from Liaison Committee. The new primary focus is reflected in the new name: the Leadings and Priorities *Support* Working Group. Our new charge focuses on supporting Friends throughout the Yearly Meeting – committees and meetings - as we go forward with our work with our priorities at heart.

The key to the vision we inherited from you is in the headings of each part of this vision, although there is more to the priorities than the headings alone, which read:

- We envision a yearly meeting deeply grounded in the practice of our faith.
- We envision a yearly meeting made up of strong, vital monthly meetings.
- We envision a yearly meeting gathered together into one body.
- We envision a yearly meeting that nurtures our children, youth and young adults.
- We envision a yearly meeting that supports and amplifies our witness.
- We envision a yearly meeting that is accountable and transparent.

Our charge provides for representation on the WG from numerous bodies including all the regional meetings of New York Yearly Meeting, as well as from several committees and other bodies including Meetings for Discernment, Powell House and ARCH or Aging Concerns Committee. The Yearly Meeting assistant clerk and the general secretary are designated to serve ex officio, with the assistant clerk designated as convener.

As of this writing, there are many gaps in representation and too few of us, but we are already working hard nevertheless, at the same time that we are seeking more

widespread representation. Of particular concern is the absence of any representatives from our programmed meetings and from Northeastern and Butternuts regions and our largest region, Farmington-Scipio. We encourage Friends to consider joining us, in particular from these meetings. Just contact me or any member and let us know if you would like to work with us.

The current group has met several times, in person and by conference call. We are in the process of determining how we can best support committees and meetings and help hold strong to the vision that Friends approved.

To support the implementation of this vision, we will be talking with Yearly Meeting committee clerks and with the Yearly Meeting staff to gain a sense of how the priorities are informing their work. We will also be reading through responses to the Yearly Meeting accountability queries. If you do not know what the accountability queries are, they are the questionnaires that your Yearly Meeting committees fill out annually and turn into your coordinating committee clerks. The body approved the use of these queries in 2002 to help us “recover a more Spirit led structure,” which is a goal very much connected to what we are doing. We are also reviewing state of the meeting reports, and we will be in regular contact with monthly meetings and regional meetings to listen in order to expand our understanding of all issues and concerns that apply to our charge.

Already, quite a lot is happening in the light of our corporate vision. Ministry Coordinating Committee has a new Outreach Working Group—a step toward strong, vital monthly meetings. Trustees are working to simplify the accounting and reporting to you of our trust funds—a big step toward being more accountable and transparent. The Indian Affairs Committee initiated a letter asking for Pope Francis’ repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery—a step toward supporting and amplifying our witness. We hired a new Children and Youth Field Secretary—a step toward nurturing our children and our youth. And Sessions Committee is working on a “pay as led” plan for summer sessions to make them available to all Friends. We see many opportunities for more advances in other areas as well, and will always remain open to constructive input from anyone and any entity of the Yearly Meeting. We are very hopeful about the continued positive direction of the Yearly Meeting.

We invite any questions or insight you may have at any time, and we welcome offers to help us with this work. The current members of the WG are here before you. You may contact any of us at any time with your questions, ideas, suggestions and offers. We trust to the Light to guide the Working Group and to guide the Yearly Meeting body. That trust is the foundation of our work.

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