

On Recording Gifts in Ministry

Ministry Coordinating Committee is aware of the different understandings and concerns Friends have regarding our long time practice of recording gifts in the ministry. At Fall Sessions in 2011, we heard ministry questioning and affirming the continuation of this practice today. MCC was asked to explore it further. We felt it was appropriate to prayerfully consider the issues relating to recording and supporting gifts in the ministry as they directly impact the vitality of the ministry among us.

MCC provided a number of opportunities for Friends across the Yearly Meeting to think about and discuss this practice. In June of last year each Monthly Meeting was sent a short history of recording gifts as well as a number of queries about ministry and an invitation to join us at summer sessions for a threshing session. The threshing session on Wednesday morning of summer sessions 2012 was well attended and we heard many Friends speak to these queries: What are your greatest hopes and fears concerning NYYM's practice of recording gifts in ministry? What life, what practices are being called forth today? How may our corporate practices reflect that Life in which unity in the Spirit is experienced?

Our fears related to equality, hierarchy, lifting people over one another. They spoke to a concern about our ability to do personal and corporate discernment. They spoke to our faithfulness in worship and in carrying out leadings. Our hopes for recording focused on the importance of supporting ministry. Recording is one form of support. There was a recognition of the diversity of our gifts and that the community is served by the diversity God has given the body. Corporate forms of support nurture all in the meeting community.

We heard the call to build up the Life of our existing practices of recording names of Friends with gifts in the ministry and of the Yearly Meeting endorsing the Minutes of Friends traveling under a concern. And, we were challenged to be open to new ways to name, to recognize, to support and to offer loving and engaged oversight and accountability to Friends with a broad range of gifts in ministry.

MCC hosted an interest group on gifts in the ministry at summer sessions. We also sponsored a Powell House retreat in September that continued and expanded our discussion of ministry and support of ministry in many of its forms including eldership, healing & vocal/pastoral ministry. The November 2012 issue of Spark was on the theme of ministry and included more discussions of recording gifts as one of a number of ways of recognizing, naming and cultivating gifts in ministry in our meetings. This issue also included an extensive list of resources on ministry.

In our historical and present practice, recording by the Yearly Meeting is sought by Monthly Meetings for individuals in whom they recognize particular gifts in vocal ministry and/or gifts in pastoral care. The procedures to be followed are outlined in *Faith and Practice*, and elaborated more fully in a pamphlet produced in 1992 by the NYYM Ministry and Counsel: *Recording Gifts in Ministry* (available on the website). Our current practice is slightly different based upon our revised structure. Recording continues to be a valuable tool, which is available for Friends to use in recognizing, supporting and providing accountability for ministry in our Meeting communities and in our Yearly Meeting as a whole. Though it is not a process that all Friends embrace, it is a vital and living practice for some Meetings in our Yearly Meeting.

The Yearly Meeting is not in unity about discontinuing this practice. Indeed, we have seen renewed interest within our Yearly Meeting in recognizing and providing support and accountability to a wider array of gifts in ministry. We are seeing new life, growing edges and vital ministry in meetings that choose not to record as well as those who find value in the practice.

MCC will continue to listen to Friends on this issue. We invite you to speak to us privately about your experiences, and more importantly, we invite all to accompany one another as we continue to discern how we are being led to a place of love where all the gifts we are given are utilized, recognized and supported. We are excited to see how God will continue to work in our yearly meeting.

Minute from Nov 2011

2011-11-17. Friends considered the practice of recording gifts in the ministry, which was intentionally included in our practice at the time of the merger of our Hicksite and Orthodox yearly meetings. Different standards of practice over the intervening years were cited, and some times were recalled when the recording of gifts has served a need and some times when it had not. Friends were not in unity with regard to asking that the Ministry Coordinating Committee consider our practice and bring its discernment back to us. Further dialogue among us all was encouraged.