

From Meetings for Discernment Steering Committee To New York Yearly Meeting Summer Sessions 2014

*“The Lord has told you mortals what is good, and what it is the Lord requires of you:
only to act justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God.”*
- Micah 6:8

History

In 2007, the yearly meeting body temporarily suspended the Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Counsel and replaced it with Meetings for Discernment, giving Meetings for Discernment 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.’ In July 2008, and again in July 2011, the provisional status of the Meetings for Discernment was extended. The second extension ends this week.

Meetings for Discernment as a Practice of New York Yearly Meeting

Meetings for Discernment are an experiment in deep listening for the movement of Spirit among us without the constraints of agendas. Open to all Friends, they provide a place outside our committee structure and business agenda for the richness of extended worship in which concerns, questions, leadings, and new gifts find voice, take shape, are seeded, or begin to emerge. They deepen connections among geographically distant Friends. During the many hours of un-programmed worship, guided by focusing queries, ministry rises up, sharing our experiences of God’s presence and direction in our individual lives and the lives of our monthly meetings, and expressing much about the yearly meeting as a whole – our concerns, leadings, joys, and pain.

Sometimes concerns rising at Meetings for Discernment are forwarded to committees or taken back to our monthly meetings and worship groups. Sometimes individuals find the spiritual support or impetus for following leadings, experiencing transformation, or furthering their spiritual journeys. We find ourselves strengthened; our bonds of love deepen, and we are better prepared to meet challenges together. We are growing in our capacity for corporate discipline and for recognizing and nurturing one another’s gifts, particularly those of eldership and vocal ministry. .

Connections to the Insights Gathered by the Priorities Working Group

The Priorities Working Group has identified for the yearly meeting six leadings and priorities, each of which the Meetings for Discernment currently speak to in some way.

We envision a yearly meeting deeply grounded in the practice of our faith. By participating in Meetings for Discernment, we acknowledge making time for worship and the guidance of Spirit as precious and primary, central and centering. Having experienced the benefit of elders holding and supporting groups, some Friends have subsequently incorporated that practice into their Meetings for Worship with an Attention to Business and into committee work.

We envision a yearly meeting made up of strong, vital monthly meetings. At Meetings for Discernment, Friends serve as a body to listen to what is rising within our monthly meetings and worship groups, and share rising issues and concerns through the Yearly Meeting body.

We envision a yearly meeting gathered together into one body. Meetings for Discernment strengthen the yearly meeting community by providing an experience in which Friends worship deeply together without agendas, meeting each other in that which is Eternal, deepening our interconnections, and sharing in ministry spoken and unspoken which then resonates across the yearly meeting. Meeting for Discernment sometimes offers a larger scale view of the possible, enriching individual understanding.

We envision a yearly meeting that nurtures our children, youth, and young adults. Meetings for Discernment serve as an entry point for young adults to offer and to experience ministry at yearly meeting gatherings. Children and youth are welcome to join the worshiping body for the time they find it comfortable or fruitful.

We envision a yearly meeting that witnesses to the world on our behalf. In Meetings for Discernment, Friends share and hear ministry regarding specific witness to which we corporately or individually may be led. Prophetic voices have been raised up, and heard, echoing more widely as participants return to their local communities.

We envision a yearly meeting that is accountable and transparent. In Meetings for Discernment, we hold ourselves and one another spiritually accountable; are we hearing each other, tenderly? Are we responding faithfully to God's leadings?

Meetings for Discernment at Summer Sessions

As we call for a yearly meeting deeply grounded in the practices of our faith, it is important to make central opportunities for our community to share in our fundamental practice of gathering to listen for Spirit. Together, we draw forth the messages and ministry given to us, hear each other more deeply, enrich our interconnections and ground our actions in the world. In this comes guidance, support, testing, and increasing clarity. Coming together this way in our summer sessions gives many more Friends the opportunity to share in this experiment, and enhances our largest gathering of the year. These benefits extend beyond yearly meeting sessions and into the lives of individuals, monthly meetings and worship groups, and regional and quarterly meetings.

Meetings for Discernment were envisioned to be, and have served as, a bridge between our monthly meetings and the yearly meeting as an organization. Some Friends come to summer sessions solely, or primarily, to participate in meeting for discernment. Some have stopped in to see what it is, and found themselves at home. Committee members who are present hear about the life of our monthly meetings and worship groups, individuals and quarters, informing their committee work. The listening sessions of the Priorities Working Group point repeatedly to a very serious disconnect between our monthly meetings and the yearly meeting organization. The

Steering Committee shares the conviction heard from others in the yearly meeting that holding meetings for discernment during summer sessions is one way to remediate that disconnect, and to mediate the dynamic tensions which are part of the life of aggregate groups.

A Proposed Minute for the Body's Approval

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.

Meetings for Discernment will be held at intervals and at locations appropriate to the needs and calls of the Yearly Meeting, to be determined by the Steering Committee with input from others throughout the Yearly Meeting. For the coming year, 2014-2015, the steering committee anticipates holding two sessions, one in late February or early March at a location to be determined and one during Summer Sessions 2015.

As this yearly meeting addresses the concerns identified by the Priorities Working Group, preserving a place to gather together in that which is Eternal, outside of any formal business agenda or committee structure, seems necessary to the work ahead of us. Let us gather together for discernment, renewal, strength, and direction, and for love of one another.

An Open Invitation for Response

While the steering committee has asked Friends how we might better serve the needs of the yearly meeting, we may not have heard all concerns, and recognize that as the yearly meeting grows and changes, new concerns emerge. The steering committee strives to listen closely for ongoing guidance as to how we may best serve Spirit through the yearly meeting. The steering committee welcomes invitations for conversation, for worship, and for hosting meeting for discernment from around the yearly meeting.

Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.

via Caroline Fox, 1841