

2017 Year in Review

Steve Mohlke

NYYM General Secretary

Looking back on all that happened in New York Yearly Meeting in 2017, the three broad themes that emerge are how we communicate, nurture each other's gifts and understand community and justice.

How we communicate

We explored how new technologies could benefit us. New York Yearly Meeting launched a new website (**nyym.org**) designed to increase accessibility and ease of use, and work well on mobile phones. In social media, our Interim Young Adult Field Secretary, Emily Provance, ran the **Facebook Ads Experiment**, helping 18 monthly meetings try out advertising on Facebook. As a result, approximately 32,000 people who live near those meetings now know that Quakers are alive and worship nearby. Along with Gabi Savory Bailey, Emily organized monthly **Quaker Education and Discourse** (QuED) days at meetings around our yearly meeting, featuring speakers, a live audience, and an internet audience who could ask questions via Facebook Live. We increased our use of video conferencing. Robin Whitely and Arlene Johnson of the **Outreach Working Group** facilitated quarterly conference calls where Friends engaged in the ministry of outreach share stories and ideas. And Friends gathered online in videoconference **Conversation Circles** facilitated by our Children and Youth Field Secretary, Melinda Wenner Bradley, to share joys and concerns in the ministry of supporting First Day programs and families in local meetings.

How we nurture each other's gifts

Our Children and Youth Field Secretary, Melinda, began a partnership with Wilton and Montclair meetings for year one of the **Monthly Meeting Partner Project**, funded by a grant from the Shoemaker Fund. Those meetings are walking new paths where children and families are at the center of thinking about outreach, as well as imagining new ideas for inclusion. Additionally, families in quarters and regions have gathered for **Quaker Family Meetups**, casual opportunities for fellowship and worship together. Farmington-Scipio Region hosted a **Youth Institute** in March where

yearly meeting and Powell House staff who support youth programs led a day full of modeling, processing, and planning how to support youth work in local meetings and the region. At Summer Sessions, a gathering of the reinvigorated **Youth Committee** dreamed together about how to help young Friends grow through Quaker spiritual formation programs and transition to young adulthood in our Society. Fourteen local meetings hosted programs where yearly meeting staff offered resources and challenged Friends to find new ways to involve younger Friends in our faith and practice, including worship. We gathered for multigenerational worship at Spring and Summer Sessions, where **Community Worship** included diverse voices across ages and affinities this year.

We substantially **simplified our finances**. In an effort to clarify and streamline our financial operations, our treasurer, Mary Hannon Williams, consolidated and reorganized our accounting. This will significantly reduce the cost of auditing our books and will lead to smoother expense reporting and reimbursement. Our **Financial Services Committee** not only budgeted for 2018 but also looked ahead at opportunities and challenges over the next few years. This work, and the work of other administrators, in turn, supports the gifts and work of individuals in NYYM.

In July, **Christopher Sammond** stepped out of his role as General Secretary after thirteen years of service, during which he facilitated **the naming and development of spiritual gifts** of many people. He played a role in most of the highlights listed in this article. In August, **Steve Mohlke** of Ithaca Meeting became our General Secretary. He began **listening for Spirit's call** as heard through the gifts and ministries of Friends in NYYM.

How we understand community and justice

Many of us continued to hold **Alternatives to Violence** (AVP) workshops in prisons. Shirley Way and Fazilee Buechel (Ithaca Meeting) traveled to El Salvador to hold AVP workshops in that strife-torn country. Chatham-Summit Meeting sponsored its third AVP day camp this year. Old Chatham Meeting continued its successful **peace and justice** film and discussion series. Wilton Meeting continued its work to **abolish solitary confinement**, and Rochester Meeting supported the **Gandhi Institute**.

The **Friends Center for Racial Justice**, led by Angela Hopkins and joined by people from around the yearly meeting, celebrated one year since that ministry officially began. Through a careful process, community, leadership and accountability are being cultivated so as to not re-create the patterns of European dominance that has colonized all of us.

Spurred by young adults who identify as Quaker but for whom the traditional process of becoming a member isn't working, the **Alternate Paths to Membership** working group started exploring what it means to be a member and whether membership needs to be tied to a specific monthly meeting.

The men in our **prison worship groups** were thankful for their extended Quaker family—the “wonderful and compassionate volunteers” who “deal with the rules and frustrations of prison life in order to comfort us and pray with us.” There was also a yearning for connection to the wider Quaker community.

In early July, the annual **Friends General Conference Gathering** took place in New York State for the first time in sixteen years. More than 20 NYYM Friends joined with Friends from our co-host, Canadian Yearly Meeting, in planning and organizing this event for the 1100 Quakers who gathered in Niagara Falls. Friends from NYYM led two of the plenary programs. Vonn New organized a highly participatory, multigenerational music and movement experience. And Pamela Boyce Simms inspired and invited us to let go of old ways that aren't working and live into a new paradigm that cares for the earth.

At Summer Sessions in July, the assembled body approved a bold experiment in faith and community called **Pay as Led**. In the summer of 2019, people who choose to pay more for sessions will allow us to offer lower fees to people for whom it was previously too financially challenging to attend.

Our **Aging Resources Consultation and Help** (ARCH) program continues to encourage us to help each other in ways that may seem small, but have a huge impact—accompanying a Friend home from surgery, helping a couple complete their health care proxies, or calling a Friend who hasn't been to meeting lately. These small acts are adding up to communities that embrace Friends regardless of age. The ARCH program provides education, support, and resources to the people doing these small acts. ARCH offered a Visitor Training to Friends in New York City and facilitated workshops for

groups around the Yearly Meeting about growing older, clearing clutter, and advanced directives. ARCH Visitors began meeting regularly with older incarcerated Friends, and brought programs about life stories and grief to Attica Prison Worship Group. We enjoyed a weekend together at Powell House that deepened our commitment to **dismantling ageism**—not just for the benefit of older people, but for us all.

It was a year, like any other year, in which we lived as faithfully into spirit's call as best as we know how. **May we continue to grow in spirit and witness together.**

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Steve Mohlke

NYYM General Secretary