

Meeting For Discernment Steering Committee

Advance Report 2018

Meetings for Discernment are held each year during Summer Sessions and in the winter at a host meeting's meetinghouse. The gatherings have become a valued time for sharing with other Friends from throughout New York Yearly Meeting in extended worship. In these sessions, we may learn what is rising up in local meetings, hear inspired ministry from new and experienced Friends and gain renewed appreciation for the variety of gifts among us.

This past February 17, sixty-eight Friends gathered in the 15th Street meeting house in New York City for the winter meeting for discernment. Most Friends who participated found the experience to be deep and meaningful. With a participation of only sixty-eight in a central location, the Steering Committee is concerned that too many Friends are not truly aware of the value of the experience of meetings for discernment, a rare experience of extended worship without any press of business or decision making. This was a normal practice among Friends in past centuries, and for good reason. We hope to try to do a better job of making better understood the spiritual value of such deep sharing so that more Friends will attend and discover why so many look forward to the gatherings and attend whenever they are able.

This year, the Steering Committee will be reviewing the process of creating queries. We may want to consider less directive queries so that Friends do not feel restricted by the queries in their messages. Should the queries lean toward being personally reflective? Toward concerns of the local meetings and how they are faring? Toward what is rising in the local meetings and throughout the Yearly Meeting? Toward specific rising concerns such as pay-as-led and/or racism? Toward the "hard" issues of the world and how we may be led to respond? Do we need queries at all? For both the morning and the afternoon session? We may experiment at Summer Sessions 2018, and we would value your input afterward.

The gatherings are all organized by the Steering Committee with the help of the local host committee. Rather than being a burden, hosting is usually experienced as a true

opportunity for the local meeting to connect deeply with Friends from throughout the Yearly Meeting, both as a body and as individuals. The experience of hosting is much less demanding than hosting a spring or fall session. It brings meeting members together in what is usually found to be a rewarding group experience for the meeting. The committee also finds that Friends who are asked to serve as elders and clerks during the process express a willingness to serve because the process has spiritual depth and value both to them as participants and to the host meetings. All Friends are invited to attend all of our gatherings. The cost is small and travel expenses are available on request. There is of course no additional cost at summer sessions.

The Steering Committee meets monthly by conference call and expects to continue its work to provide this twice yearly environment for deep extended worship. We encourage participation by all Friends. You are invited to experience the foundational experience of Friends across the centuries and across the world as we sit and listen deeply.

Jeffrey Aaron, Caroline Lane, Co-Clerks