

Liaison Report on the Evolution of NYYM Structure

At Spring Sessions 2018, Friends approved the beginning of an experiment in revisions to our Yearly Meeting structure, with the expectation of a report to come to Summer Sessions 2019. This approval was memorialized in minute 2018-04-06, which is available in the current 2018-2019 Yearbook, pages 24 to 26. This is the expected report from Liaison Committee.

The experiment included the following specific provisions, noted in the minute of approval:

- Suspension of Nurture Coordinating Committee (NCC), its constituents transferred as follows:
- Aging Concerns Committee to General Services Coordinating Committee (GSCC),
- Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) to become a subcommittee of Sessions Committee, a part of GSCC,
- Epistle Committee, Powell House and Youth Committee to Ministry Coordinating Committee,
- Reps of FGC, FUM, and FWCC to an “affiliate group” linked with Liaison Committee,
- Oakwood Board to the care of Liaison Committee.

It is appropriate to provide some clarifications why this experiment was undertaken and the concerns that were expressed, as well as how it now stands.

- NCC was suspended because there was little life in the committee, which had been struggling for some years. There was no appropriate rising new clerk and few committee members and reps attended the most recent meetings. A concern was expressed about suspending “nurture itself”, but of course, there is nurture in all that we do, and certainly in the work of the other CCs.
- Aging Concerns seemed to be a good fit in GSCC, particularly in light of the fact that the ARCH Coordinators, who have a close supporting and nurturing relationship with Aging Concerns, have been integrated as staff into our Yearly Meeting structure. This arrangement seems well suited.
- JYM also seems well suited as a subcommittee of Sessions in light of the fact that their exclusively Summer Sessions related work is closely related to the work of Sessions Committee. The current clerk of Sessions Committee enthusiastically approves of this relationship.
- Epistle, Powell House and Youth Committee seemed like a good fit for MCC; however, MCC members expressed concerns that they would need more meeting time to address the concerns of all their constituent bodies. This arrangement so far seems to be working out, along with creative new ways that that committee has begun to use to meet its needs. From the committee minutes: *Many of us feel that the question isn't just about whether the slightly modified new structure is working well enough. We need to seek actively for what structure we need to have.*
- Moving FGC, FUM and FWCC to Liaison as a group of “Affiliates” seems to be functioning at least as well as it did as a part of NCC, but questions and concerns remain. The designated contact person on Liaison for these bodies is the Assistant Clerk of our Yearly Meeting, currently Elaine Learnard, who has reached out to them. They tend to function on their own and are as much reps to their wider Quaker bodies as they are a part of our Yearly Meeting. They are being invited to report on a rotating basis to our gatherings, which is a positive step forward. We may wish to consider whether other bodies of reps to other wider Quaker bodies, currently mostly on Witness Coordinating Committee (WCC), should also become a part of this structural change, but whether or not the current and other entities belong in the care of Liaison Committee or elsewhere is a question yet to be considered further, as well as the specific relationship to our Yearly Meeting Assistant Clerk.

- The move of Oakwood Board to Liaison was separated from the other affiliates because Oakwood, though also a separate entity, is very much NYYM's "own" school, and is recognized and cherished as such by both NYYM and Oakwood. The relationship through Liaison Committee, however, is another matter to consider further in the future.

There was a sense of the meeting that the establishment of "yet another" ad hoc committee on the structure of our Yearly Meeting was not how we should proceed in light of the many prior such committees over recent decades. Therefore, Liaison Committee has asked Friends to make suggestions to committees they serve on and to consider that the CC clerks would welcome any specific recommendations. In addition, appropriate informal experiments and small changes could be undertaken by committees and others.

There have been few such specific recommendations to this point; however, there are experiments that are very promising, including the referenced new practices within MCC itself.

One such experiment has been referred to as "distributed clerking." The role of clerk, in particular for some committees, is extensive enough that it is difficult to find new clerks who have all the experience and skills, as well as the availability and willingness to commit to the extensive work involved. Breaking the work down and distributing them to more than one person already began at Summer Sessions 2018. WCC and Financial Services Committee each distributed the workload to three committee members in order to find a replacement for the retiring clerk. Both committees seem to be functioning well since then, and the idea, now referenced as "distributed clerking", may well become an important concept as we move forward in the future. In fact, there are other yearly meetings in which there are two yearly meeting clerks, one for the annual gathering and one for the interim gatherings. NYYM may wish to consider that approach as well. The current Clerk of our Yearly Meeting has already had our Assistant Clerk do some clerking at our gatherings and expects to do more so as time goes on.

Other specific concerns are being considered by Liaison and perhaps by others, though not yet reported to Liaison, such as small study groups of volunteers to assist where there appear to be problems. One such problem is NYYM's Nominating Committee, whose membership is currently entirely by appointment from the regions, weighted by regional membership numbers. This system has not been functioning well for many years and is a critical problem. Four of the nine regions have no representatives and most of the others are underrepresented or represented by one individual who has served for perhaps too many years. The committee has been much too small and with insufficient knowledge about potential individuals to serve from those regions that do not have representatives.

Another study group may be formed to consider revising our Handbook to be more descriptive than prescriptive, which is to say, make it more flexible and descriptive of best practices than a rule book, which in effect it currently is. This is currently how some other yearly meetings handle their handbook.

Another study group may recommend so-called permanent committees and semi-permanent committees with "sunset dates" to review if there is insufficient life to continue when they are reviewed – or some other process to enable easier laying down of committees that no longer have life.

Other ideas include possible merging of some committees or converting a committee into an appointee or an appointee with an assistant.

We are also experimenting with revisions to the so-called "consent agenda" as Friends are aware from our discussions during Spring and Summer Sessions 2019. That process was never formalized by minute or specified as to structure, which we are doing at this time.

Changes are also being made to Interim Actions by the Clerk and/or General Secretary. This process was approved by minute in 2014. We are in process of making a revision to the process of reporting all interim actions by dissemination at time of action instead of by report at the next gathering.

Friends are asked to consider all such ideas and to make known their thoughts, both as to the ideas and to where they may apply in their committee work. In addition, Friends are invited to make new suggestions at any time to any member of Liaison Committee.

At this time, there are no specific proposals for consideration for approval other than clarification of the Interim Actions process.

July, 2019