

Recommendation from the Meetings for Discernment Steering Committee  
to the New York Yearly Meeting Summer Sessions 2020

The Steering Committee for the Meetings for Discernment recommends to the New York Yearly Meeting that the Meetings for Discernment be made a standing function of our yearly meeting.

The origins and history of the Meetings for Discernment have been detailed in previous reports to the yearly meeting. To aid in considering this recommendation and discerning the way forward, we provide the following information, including (in *italics*) quotations from the 2014 report, made at the time of the most recent extension of the Meetings for Discernment.

**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.

In 2014, the provisional status was again extended and that approval ends with this year's Summer Sessions 2020.

The Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Counsel was laid down in 2016.

**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 unprogrammed 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.*

From the beginnings of Meetings for Discernment, Friends were invited to serve as “elders,” a non-hierarchical practice of holding the body in the Light. Through the Meetings for Discernment “elders gatherings,” a diverse group of Friends learned, reflected on, and practiced skills that have served to ground and center the yearly meeting in all its sessions.

In Summer 2019 and Winter 2020, the Meetings for Discernment expanded its scope to provide space to consider specific issues facing our yearly meeting, at the Summer meeting a proposal to provide an additional pathway to membership and at the Winter meeting an opportunity to consider the impact of power and authority in our lives and in our meetings.

### **Reasons for the recommendation**

The practice of extended worshipful discernment is foundational to our life as Friends. On a corporate level, Meetings for Discernment offer the space to ground decisions in deep worship. We believe that this ongoing practice responds to current needs within our yearly meeting, and provides opportunities for spiritual deepening and growth.

### **Recommendation for Action**

The Steering Committee for the Meetings for Discernment is in unity to ask that the Meetings for Discernment be approved as a standing function of our Yearly Meeting, per the following proposed minute:

- a. the Meetings for Discernment shall be a standing function of our yearly meeting;
- b. the *Handbook* pages for the Meetings for Discernment and for the Meetings for Discernment Steering Committee shall be revised to reflect this status and the Steering Committee’s current practice (except for the method of appointment of members of the Steering Committee);
- c. Appointment of members of the Steering Committee will be the responsibility of the Yearly Meeting Nominating Committee; and
- d. *Faith and Practice* shall be revised to reflect the purposes and processes of the Meetings for Discernment as a part of our faith and practice.

As approved by the Steering Committee of the Meetings for Discernment, 7/1/ 2020

Beverly Archibald

Barbra Bleecker

Lu Harper

Angela Hopkins

Caroline Lane

Elaine Learnard

Steve Mohlke

Chloe Tomlinson