

Report to Fall Sessions 2013
Meeting for Discernment Steering Committee

Since our last report to this body there have been two Meetings for Discernment, one on March 2 at Brooklyn Monthly Meeting and one on July 23 at New York Yearly Meeting's Summer Sessions at Silver Bay. Both were occasions of deep worship around queries. Our winter queries paralleled those that the Priorities Working Group asks when they visit meetings. They were: "What are your dreams, yearnings, and hopes for your meeting? What is God calling your meeting to become? What are your hopes, leadings, and expectations for our yearly meeting as a gathered body? What work is God calling us to do together that we cannot do separately?" Our 2013 summer queries focused on faithfulness, revisiting earlier queries along those same lines, and were: "What does it mean to be faithful as individuals? As a gathered body? What does faithfulness mean for a meeting?" There were many messages as Friends responded to these queries, and with the help of elders holding the meeting in prayer worship was deep.

On March 1, 2014, with a snow date of March 8, we will hold our 13th session, at Purchase Monthly Meeting. As usual, elders will gather the evening before to prepare and to enjoy fellowship. Purchase Meeting has appointed a host committee and has recruited help from Purchase Quarter. Registration details and our queries will be in the January *Spark*, as well as be available on line in *InfoShare* and at nyym.org.

In our continuing effort to widely share the experience of the Meetings for Discernment, our report from the March sessions and several previous reports are available on the NYYM website under Committees/Meeting for Discernment Steering Committee. Our report on the Meeting for Discernment held at summer sessions, when finished, will also be available on line. We have been working with Steve Davison to allow easier access to Meetings for Discernment information on the website and look forward to our own page when the site is redesigned. On that page we hope to have a list of all the queries that have been used in the Meetings for Discernment, in the hope that Friends might find revisiting them a useful way to deepen their spiritual lives, both corporately and individually.

The Meeting for Discernment Steering Committee is preparing for the decision the Yearly Meeting will make at summer sessions 2014 on the continuation of the Meetings for Discernment. Meetings for Discernment are charged with carrying out some of the work of the suspended Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Counsel; it is unlikely that that Meeting will be revived, and some provision is likely to be made to take up its work. The Meetings for Discernment provide opportunities for deeper consideration of concerns the Yearly Meeting has agreed to focus on, one of the tasks it was formed to do. As noted above, our winter queries were essentially those that the Priorities Working Group uses, allowing a continuing and deepening consideration of them.

Other work which was considered possible in the minute which formed the Meetings for Discernment, such as "consider minutes from monthly and regional meetings that reflect their concerns, and support individual leadings that have been seasoned by monthly and regional meetings" (YM Minute 2007/07-38) the Meetings for Discernment have not yet done. We are

open to continuing direction. These are some of the roles the Meetings for Discernment now fill: they offer a Yearly Meeting experience to those who do not attend summer sessions, or do not attend the full summer sessions. They are an opportunity for sharing around queries and for hearing the condition both of individuals and of monthly meetings, and they have begun, powerfully, to fill a need for many for a time of guided extended communal worship. In addition, they have proven to be an enriching experiment in eldering.

As the Steering Committee works to understand the place of Meetings for Discernment in the life of the Yearly Meeting we have invited the clerk of the Priorities Working Group to one of our meetings and have followed the work of that group. We feel that the minute we bring to this body in summer 2014 should coordinate with the work of that group and that the Meetings for Discernment should attempt to meet some of the needs they have identified. We have begun to discuss ways that might happen.

At summer sessions the committee held several mealtime talks to listen to Friends' experiences of Meetings for Discernment. We continue to invite all to talk to a member of the committee. (*Ask those present to stand.*) We know that opening space for extended worship during the crowded calendar at summer sessions and giving the time and energy necessary to host a winter Meeting for Discernment means that other things may not get done, (although we have heard from others that the work we do together is increasingly enhanced by our worship together in Meeting for Discernment), and we want to listen for God's will for us going forward. Almost all of what we have formally heard is that Meetings for Discernment are highly valued. There is some confusion about what we are discerning and perhaps some hesitation about extended worship from those who lack that experience, and we may need to work more on educating those new to the Meetings about the practice. But for most of those from whom we heard, the meetings are a highlight of their Yearly Meeting experience.

At the end of the Meeting for Discernment day, there is a time for reflection on the day. All are invited, but those who have served as elder are encouraged to speak first about their experiences. We have found that as the elders ground the meetings in worship, they also are moved. I want to close with a quote from an elder at the March meeting: "I was very aware of the increased level of discipline and trust. Many times I felt I was in a gathered meeting. It feels as though the spirit is doing the holding and it has less to do with me. Usually in the past I've felt myself called to hold and encircle the body, but not today. It *was* a body."

Lucinda Antrim, Clerk
For the Meeting for Discernment Steering Committee