

**EFFORT TO HOLD QUARTERLY MEETINGS
IN GREEN HAVEN CORRECTIONAL FACILITY**

**Description in Support of Minute Approving Litigation Against
the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision**

Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting is part of Nine Partners Quarterly Meeting. The Worship Group meets Friday evenings for approximately 2 hours; meets as a book club Thursday evenings for approximately 2 hours; and holds meetings for business on Saturdays for approximately 1.5 hours. There are 5-7 inmates registered with Green Haven Correctional Facility as part of the Worship Group; 10-12 incarcerated men regularly attend worship sessions, and as many as 17-23 attend for some occasions.

For many years, going back at least to the 1990s and perhaps to as early as 1984, full-day Quarterly Meetings (or bi-annual meetings) on Saturdays were held at Green Haven Correctional Facility (“GHCF”). These Quarterly Meetings generally lasted from the time of morning worship through mid-afternoon, and included fellowship over a meal (lunch) brought into the facility. Similar Quarterly Meeting gatherings inside other facilities under the charge of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (“DOCCS”) occur or have occurred at Auburn, Otisville, Sing Sing and perhaps other DOCCS correctional facilities.

Beginning with 2015, when DOCCS hired a new Deputy Superintendent of Program Services, Jaifa Collado, annual written requests by the Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting for continued inclusion of Quarterly Meetings in the annual Religious Events Calendar have been rejected, primarily on the basis that Friends are “Protestants” and therefore are entitled only to participate in the Pentecost “Family Event”.

Friends have made substantial efforts to get Quarterly Meetings in GHCF restored. Timely annual requests by the Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting for the inclusion of Quarterly Meetings in the Religious Holy Day Calendar have been summarily rejected or ignored. A delegation led by the then General Secretary of New York Yearly Meeting, Christopher Sammond, and the then Executive Secretary of NYSCOC, Paula Gravelle, met with DOCCS officials in May 2015. The elimination of Quarterly Meetings at GHCF was discussed at the meeting, and the DOCCS representatives promised to investigate and get back to liaison for the Friends delegation. DOCCS never followed up. Letters from New York Yearly Meeting's Prisons Committee to DOCCS have gone unanswered.

Because DOCCS has failed to address this problem despite substantial efforts by Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting and by Friends in Nine Partners Quarterly Meeting and New York Yearly Meeting over a number of years, Friends are clear to seek recognition of their rights through a lawsuit brought under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, 42 USCS § 2000cc-1. This statute (similar to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act) requires governments, including DOCCS, to accommodate inmates' religious practices unless the government can prove that permitting the religious activity would jeopardize a compelling governmental interest and that there are no other ways to achieve this compelling governmental interest which would be less harmful to the inmates' religious freedom.

The lawsuit will be filed in Federal Court in New York. Frederick Dettmer (Purchase Meeting) is acting as counsel *pro bono*. Expenses, which may total a few thousand dollars, will be paid out of Prison Committee's allocations from the Sharing Fund. Prisons Committee is prepared to name a small *ad hoc* committee to oversee the Yearly Meeting's participation.

Prisons Committee has been working with this concern for four years and is clear that the Yearly Meeting should approve participating in the proposed lawsuit. The Committee approved the following minute at Fall Sessions 2016:

“The Prisons Committee of New York Yearly Meeting agrees to support any legal action initiated by individual members of the Green Haven worship group against the NY DOCCS in pursuit of their religious rights under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act. Such support may include pro bono legal representation, financial support to cover filing fees, etc. and spiritual support through the process.”

The Year Meeting’s Board of Trustees approved filing a lawsuit at its meeting on February 11, 2018:

“**Prisons Committee Request:** Judy Meikle & Robert Martin, from the Yearly Meeting’s Prisons Committee, presented a request for Trustees approval, subject to approval by the YM Body, of filing a lawsuit against DOCCs under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (comparable to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act) in order to force DOCCs to permit Quarterly Meetings to be held in Green Haven Correctional Facility (“GHCF”). Their report is attached. After discussion, **Trustees approve, subject to approval by the YM Body.**”