

Who is God Calling Us to Be in the 21st Century?

Report of Long Range Planning Group of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for Annual Sessions July 26, 2012

INTRODUCTION

Bold.

Prophetic.

Frame Bending.

These are phrases that have begun resonating in the Long Range Planning Group (LRPG). Our work was initiated following a decision in last year's Sessions (2011) to undertake a discernment and planning process. Since its formation in November 2011, the LRPG has followed an aggressive meeting schedule and completed wide-ranging "Listening Sessions" throughout PYM's geographic region (see <http://www.pym.org/news/long-range-planning-listening-sessions-announced> for more information). We are also working with a consultant familiar with the challenges to faith communities as we move into a new world and face inexorable forces of change. (Readers are referred to our first report found in PYM Today- Spring, 2012- for details of our work to date.)

REVIEW OF CHARGE

Selected lines from October 10, 2011
Recommendation to Interim Meeting for Planning Process

...this group will take up the work of developing a discernment and planning process and a first iteration of a strategic plan for our Yearly Meeting... Envisioned Product of LRPG: A first iteration of a 5-year plan encompassing such elements as: vision and mission, identity, strategic goals, structural improvements, and an evaluation process... What is PYM in this case? For whom are we planning? ...we are referring to a plan for the non-profit structures and practices of the Yearly Meeting.

Our arc of Quaker history has lent us perspective. We have viewed our work as being based on the sound foundations set down over 300 years ago, and cast our planning with a vision toward 100 years in the future. So we invite you to step up into a ‘balcony’ view with us as we ponder the past and plan for the future.

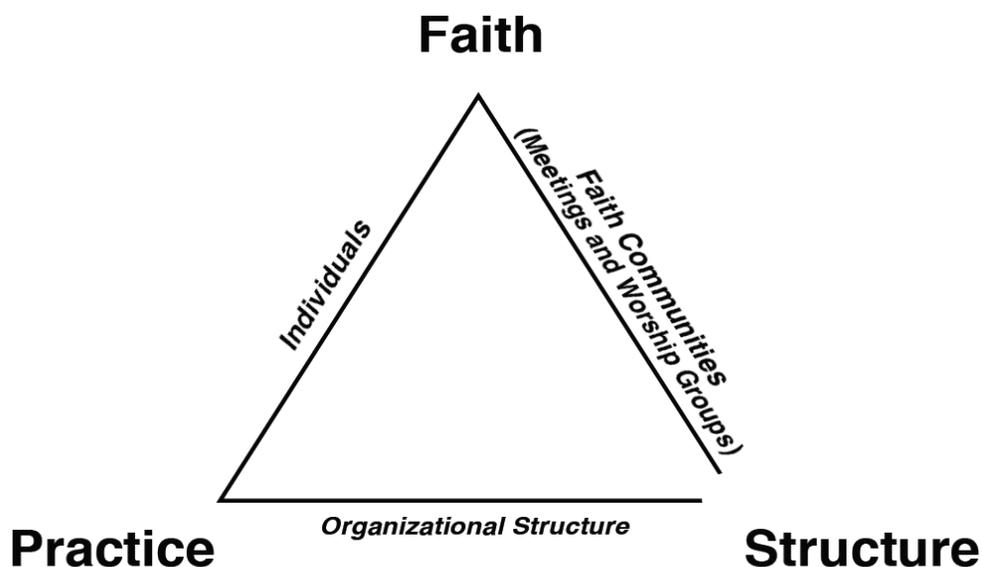
We would also like to invite all Friends to consider using common language as we discuss the future of our Society. Agreeing upon three simple definitions will help us speak with specificity, and economy, as we evaluate and plan for the future. These definitions in no way limit or bind us but are being used to set a frame for our discussion:

Faith -- what we hold as our collective, core beliefs as Friends.

Practice -- how we live out our Faith.

Structure -- finances, buildings, programs, and staff, Meeting structure (Monthly, Quarterly, Yearly.)

A graphic way of envisioning how these three fundamentals interact is shown below:



A Dynamic Triad for Friends: Faith, Practice and Structure

HISTORY

As we reflect on the ‘recent’ history of PYM, it appears that developments of the last century regarding the management of our Structure reached a somewhat satisfactory place, let us just say between the 1920s and 1940s. During this time our Society continued to follow leadings and be forces of change in the world. And as always throughout our long history, Friends engaged in a deep conversation with Spirit in an unending quest to follow revelation.

These three fundamentals of our Society -- Faith, Practice and Structure as defined above -- have worked in unceasing interplay, at times in a ‘tension’ as each side of the triangle worked to find balance with the other sides, and at other times in complete harmony. PYM post-WWII appeared to be healthy, unified, and of one purpose as it moved through time and space. When way was unclear, Friends worked in Faith to find core values to apply to Practice and Structure.

This on-going dynamic and cyclical interplay served Friends well -- but as early as 1978 Friends noted a widening gap between Structure and the other sides of our triad. A call was made for closer ties between organizational Structure and Monthly Meetings.

Attempts at refining Structure have been made in the past decades; and older Friends may recall these attempts. These prior attempts addressed Structure alone, but the proposed modifications did not lead us to a new balance and energy. Recently, many may recall work on “Priorities” (Priorities Process Committee Report, 2009) and Friends should know that LRPG’s recent Listening has found continued emphasis on exactly what was noted during the “Priorities’ work. But the Priorities work did not lead to change. Valuable work was performed under the “Governance Project Group” with a greater recognition of the changes occurring within our Society regarding the purpose and function of Interim Meeting. Again, the change did not lead to harmony within the three corners of our triangle of Faith, Practice and Structure. Most recently, Financial Stewardship Committee (FSC) has had to recognize and address our resource problems and done admirable work to bring balance to that area of Structure.

Now it is time for LRPG to address all three corners.

Will things be different this time? Yes, because they must be.

Our resources have changed; both in finances and in Friends available to do our work.

The world has changed radically but Friends have not changed in our relationship to the world.

LRPG can easily suggest short term changes to current organizational Structure. Changes to Structure in a longer view, however, should come from a holistic evaluation of our Faith and our Practice. Deeper work is required in addition to re-assigning names and duties to committees. While LRPG has a charge that encompasses Structure, the charge was written in light of our Faith and Practice. We feel that our Society must address these larger issues. We trust that, from that work, further Structural changes to our organization will serve our Faith Community and our world in this century.

THE QUESTION

The LRPG calls for deeper discernment by our worship community to answer a core question: *Who is God calling us to be in the 21st Century?* The answer to that question should propel the work on Structure.

In our Listening, we have heard again and again a core theme: there is a ‘disconnect’ between Structure and the members of our Society. It seems clear that this is the result of a growing fracture that is driven by multiple forces. We recognize that we can suggest changes to Structure as we move forward in our work, especially in light of the work done by the Financial Stewardship Committee. But there is no magic bullet, no one answer to Structure that will truly answer the needs of our society in the 21st Century. We have considered making ‘frame bending’ and ‘bold’ suggestions for Structural changes, and may yet do so under the guidance of our community -- but still we feel a need to address such change in a larger context.

At first tentatively, then more strongly, LRPG members began facing our fractured Structure from a different direction. We asked softly, then quite boldly. “What if there was no PYM?”

What would Friends need to have to continue their Practice? What would Friends create for their needs? What works need support beyond Monthly or Quarterly Meeting resources? The answers clearly echoed the findings of the Priorities Committee:

Spiritual Growth and Renewal

Caring For Our Community

Witnessing Our Faith

Making Ourselves Known

Our Structure needs to support these Priorities to further our Practice and Faith.

Further, LRPG has found that there is a need for a healing of the disconnect we note between organizational Structure and our Faith Community. There is a need for Structure as a whole to become more an agent of service and support to Monthly Meetings and Individual Friends as we strive to live out our Practice in the world. Some beginning observations are:

1. Orientation of PYM Structure must move to that of direct service to Monthly Meetings and Individuals (possible committee changes)
2. Outreach, Pastoral Care, Religious Education, Worship and Ministry remain core priorities for our Society and PYM Structure should align to support these functions.
3. PYM Structure appears to serve best when connecting and gathering our Society both at Individual and Monthly and Quarterly Level (such as Annual Sessions, Youth Activities)
4. The infrastructure of PYM remains necessary to assist in communications, maintaining our Library and other resources, support to Monthly Meetings and Quarterly Meetings in programming and providing opportunities for collective action

for concerns raised at MM, brought through QM to Interim Meeting/Yearly Meeting (Eco Justice, gun violence)

5. There may be room to consider removing certain aspects from the current PYM structure to a Foundation which would be a repository for Restricted Endowments and administer Grant making.
6. Simplification of the current Committee and Working Group structure seems clearly indicated; this might be achieved by moving to four larger committees focused upon the four Priorities.

We note these changes address organizational Structure at present, and go a good way towards turning the direction of PYM towards greater utility for the membership. We also note, however, that these can be seen as short-term fixes that address only one piece of the larger dynamic relationship among Structure, Faith, and Practice.

Before full structural change can occur, this body must take to heart issues L RPG notes as core to our problems. Before we can elucidate a Vision, a Mission, and a Structure to support our work, we must take the bold step of addressing foundational issues that have plagued us over the past several decades. We suggest discernment of the following:

Friends do not have a ‘hireling ministry’ but we have Staff. Our reality does not match our beliefs.

Too much is being asked of too few Friends who take on the work of the whole: Friends can become overworked, disillusioned and burnt out. What is our role in this? Is this why there aren’t more Friends stepping into service roles for the larger community? Is the work being done not led by our Faith and Practice and thus does not speak to our Membership?

What makes my life a Quaker Life?

How much change can we tolerate? Why have we tolerated NOT changing?

Who is God calling us to be in the 21st Century? The answer is not what we are doing now either as an organization or as individuals. If we are a Faith Community that discerns together, we must ask: *“Have we let both our organizational structure and our worshipping community structure dominate our faith and practice?” “How can they come into vital balance once again?”*

Friends have long been known for their strong core of beliefs that guide their service to the world and their fellows. In many ways we are strong individualists who follow the voice of Spirit to service. But we are also part of a larger community and it is time for us to assess the voice of the Spirit for our larger faith community, not just for our individual leadings. How a Friend views this call will be deeply guided by each person’s individual circumstances.

LRPG SATURDAY ACTIVITY- DESCRIPTION

In the Saturday afternoon meeting for business the members of the LRPG will hold another Listening Session for Friends. At it, we will ask you to spend time discerning answers to one of the hard questions we are wrestling with. We will take about 45 minutes to learn what is in your hearts. We will benefit from your wisdom.

SUMMARY

It is good for Friends to have something ‘in hand’ to spur discussion and discernment. A quick summary of LRPG’s work to date and for the future would look like this:

1. We have Listened and will continue to Listen
2. We feel that change in Structure must flow from discernment of our Faith and our Practice.
3. We plan to introduce short term Structural change suggestions as we move forward in our work, based upon answers to our discernment questions.
4. We call upon PYM to review the ‘disconnect’ LRPG names above and the Questions we have posed.

5. We will begin to explore Mission, Vision and Plan (with timeframes and deliverables.)
6. We will research other Yearly Meeting Structures.
7. We will report to Interim Meeting and may request discussion and advice on topics.
8. We ask for your wisdom, prayers and insight and encourage you to submit via PYMLRPG@gmail.com

THE CALL

Long Range Planning is in fact a call for Prophetic Voices to name our future.

Long Range Planning is in fact a real movement of Spirit challenging us to evaluate our core beliefs and name the direction we vision for our Practice in the 21st Century.

Long Range Planning is an opportunity for us as a Community to discern who God is calling us to become.

How Bold Can We Be In Answering This Call?