

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
General Secretary's Report
 July 26, 2012

Greetings, Friends.

During my time as General Secretary, it has been my practice to ask staff to come forward at the beginning of my General Secretary's report so to be introduced and acknowledged. With our new sessions schedule making the timing of my report somewhat uncertain, and the fact that staff are somewhat venue-scattered, I will not be doing that today. I do, however, want to begin by acknowledging and appreciating our Yearly Meeting staff who have been working so hard to make these annual sessions a success.

My report will have two parts. I'd like first to look back over the year which ends with these sessions, and then I would like to look forward to the year which is ahead of us.

Reductions in Staff

This year has not been an easy one for the staff of the Yearly Meeting. In the last twelve months it has been necessary for the Yearly Meeting to undertake a substantial financial and staff downsizing. In retrospect, the last year has really been part of a two year process of downsizing. And even before this most immediate two year period there were other, less dramatic, reductions in staff.

The challenging work of downsizing comes in at least two different ways. First, there is the work necessary to manage the downsizing, work which often takes priority over all other work; and then there is the painful experience of staff layoffs.

I want to honor the staff who have left the employment of the Yearly Meeting since last July 1, 2011, or who will be leaving by December 31st of this year, on account of PYM's reduced financial resources. I will read the names of these staff members, alphabetically, including their positions. I am including in this list those whose jobs were laid down on account of last year's budget process because I don't think we did a very good job at last year's annual sessions in naming and honoring those who were leaving, an omission for which I take responsibility.

I will read twenty names.

Priscilla Adams	Regional Secretary for Quaker Concerns (Haddonfield Quarterly Meeting)
Phil Anthony	Salem Quarterly Meeting Coordinator
Cookie Caldwell	Young Friends Coordinator
Grace Cooke	Friends in Education Coordinator
Mary Anne Crowley	Administrative Assistant for Advancement and Communications

Sadie Forsythe	Young Adult Friends Coordinator
Michael Gagne	Eco-justice Coordinator
Kaye Henley	Administrative Assistant for Development
Wright Horne	Associate Secretary for Advancement and Communications
Gary Jackson	Maintenance person at the Arch Street Meeting House
Beth Lawn	Concord Quarterly Meeting Coordinator
Hannah Mayer	Volunteer Coordinator
Tammy Nguyen	Accountant
Jess Purvis	Administrative Assistant for Business and Finance
Marie Ryan	Caln Quarterly Meeting Coordinator
Carol Strawson	Director of the Burlington Meeting House and Conference Center
Wade Wright	Upper Susquehanna Quarterly Meeting Coordinator
Jay Worrall	Arch Street Interpreter and Volunteer Coordinator

In addition to the eighteen names I've just read, there are two staff members who are staying on, but at reduced hours, going from full time to 3/5 time:

Nick Gutowski	Grants Associate
Naman Hampton	Web Content Manager

I honor the people whose names I have just shared. They are, or have been, my colleagues. They have served us well and it is with regret that their service has, or will, come to an end. On behalf of the Yearly Meeting, I acknowledge and thank them for their work.

The Work of Downsizing

Earlier I mentioned another way in which we have felt the challenge of downsizing. It is the work of managing the process of getting smaller. All staff have been impacted by this process but some have been more directly involved in the planning and decision-making, and I'm thinking primarily of the financial and accounting staff and the Staff Administrative Team. Over the past year the following is some of the work which has engaged your staff in the financial area:

1. We have worked with the Clerk of the Yearly Meeting and the alternate clerks, the Treasurer, the clerks of Financial Stewardship and Financial Oversight Working Group, and the relevant PYM committees, to identify, analyze and strategize our way out of the financial situation the Yearly Meeting realized it was in last fall. In the rest of my report, I will refer to the people and committees who had leadership responsibility in this matter as "the financial leadership."

2. We have worked with the financial leadership to create the eight page January 4, 2012 letter, sent to all members of the Yearly Meeting for whom we have email addresses, detailing the situation which then confronted the Yearly Meeting.
3. We have worked with the financial leadership to shape a new paradigm for creating the Yearly Meeting budget, one that will help insure not only balanced but sustainable budgets.
4. We have worked with the financial leadership, and the trustees of PNC Bank and Friends Fiduciary, to make possible the release of some of the unrestricted endowment funds for which they are the trustees and of which PYM is the beneficiary.
5. We have worked with the financial leadership to create the nine page June 19 letter, also sent to all members of the Yearly Meeting for whom we have email addresses, detailing the ways in which the financial situation has been addressed and sharing optimism that we are now on the far side of the crisis which first came into focus last fall.

And there have been non-financial issues which have required attention:

6. We have worked on plans for managing layoffs and followed through with the work of implementing layoffs or reductions in hours.
7. We have worked on plans, including standing committees and working groups, for how we would manage with a smaller staff.
8. We have worked with Friends Center on releasing some of our office space so to reduce our Friends Center rent.
9. We have laid down the Meeting Relations Program because we no longer had the staff for it to be viable.

Without a doubt, having a major role in managing PYM's downsizing over the last two years, and especially this year, has consumed the greatest portion of my time and has been the most significant, sustained challenge of my professional career. I have welcomed the challenge as part of my job. I have grown in the job, in part as a result of the challenge, and I continue to be grateful for the opportunity I have to serve the Yearly Meeting as its General Secretary. But just between us, I'm glad we are on the other side of the financial crisis.

Looking Forward

Now I'd like to shift my focus from the year that has just ended to the year that is just being born.

There is good news. Friends, we have met and exceeded our Annual Fund goal for the fiscal year which ended in June! The goal was to raise \$450,000 and we have raised at least \$465,000.

There's more. We budgeted income from monthly meeting covenants at \$1,250,000 and we have met this goal. In a time of financial turmoil and some uncertainty I think we have done well. I hope it won't surprise you that your General Secretary worries about the income side of our budget (as well as the expense side) all year round and in particular this year. I couldn't be happier with our results and I want to thank all those who contributed to the Annual Fund and all meetings who fulfilled their covenants. We did it!

I also want to thank the Development Services Working Group, Richard Morse, Clerk; Jennie Sheeks, our Director of Development; and the Annual Fund representatives in each of our monthly meetings for their work and for this result.

I also have good news with respect to the Arch Street Meeting House Preservation Trust. Friends may know that the Yearly Meeting has established a non-profit corporation, the Arch Street Meeting House Preservation Trust, the directors of which are to be appointed by the Yearly Meeting, for the purpose of attracting an endowment to be used for the operation and maintenance of this building. Friends may not know that it costs the Yearly Meeting close to \$300,000, net, out of the General Fund, to maintain our meeting house and the idea is that if we can raise an endowment, income from the endowment will take pressure off the General Fund. One of our monthly meetings donated the money necessary for a part-time staff person, for a term of one year, and that person, Brian Sullivan, a member of the Arch Street Meeting, began work on Monday of this week.

Thread Groups

In the year ahead we will have a smaller staff. There will be 19 FTE's of us and we will have the challenge of supporting the Yearly Meeting in new ways. I'd like to share some of the ideas we've been working on.

First, we are putting energy into how we can support opportunities for Friends within monthly meetings to learn from and support each other in areas of common concern.

When we look at our monthly meetings, we find that many, if not most, have areas of concern that include:

- Pastoral Care
- Peace and Concerns
- Religious Life for Young People
- Outreach
- Worship and Ministry

For the purposes of our PYM staff work, we are naming these areas of concerns "threads." For example, across our monthly meetings, we might talk about a pastoral care thread, a peace and concerns thread, a religious life for young people thread and so on.

Christie Duncan-Tessmer, our Associate Secretary for Program, has been talking with standing committees and working groups about creating opportunities for

connecting members of monthly meetings according to their interest in a particular thread of the life of the monthly meeting.

How can we do this?

e-newsletters

First, we want to create communications opportunities. We will be originating a family of up to five e-newsletters, each one speaking to a different thread; for example, an e-newsletter for Pastoral Care, an e-newsletter for Peace and Concerns, an e-newsletter for Worship and Ministry. Each of these e-newsletters will come out five times a year- roughly bi-monthly- and they will be designed to support Friends in meetings who are called to the work of one of the named threads.

The e-newsletters will be designed to bring us together across monthly meetings, allowing us to share the work that we are engaged in, the wisdom among us and the resources that support us. Each e-newsletter will target those within our monthly meetings who are concerned with that particular thread. For example, the Peace and Concerns e-newsletters might go to members of peace and concerns committees in all of our monthly meetings and to anyone else who might want a copy.

Content for the e-newsletter will be suggested and recruited by relevant committees, meetings and staff.

Thread Gatherings

A second way we propose to support areas of common interest in our monthly meetings is to have what might be called “thread gatherings.” Our vision is that these might happen once a year for each thread group. For example, an annual gathering for the Pastoral Care thread group, or an annual gathering for the Worship and Ministry thread group.

A thread gathering would be an opportunity to increase the grounding and skills base of Friends around a particular program area. They would offer the opportunity for Friends from across the Yearly Meeting to come together in a shared sense of community and calling.

Administrative Procedures Handbook for Committees and Working Groups

Another project we have been working on to make it easier for us to get smaller is a handbook which we are calling an “Administrative Procedures Handbook for Committees and Working Groups.”

The reality of our new situation is that staff will not be able to do all of the things that staff have done in the past and this will mean that committee members, volunteering their time, will need to step up to some of the tasks formerly done by staff.

In the past, we have organized staff support by committee. That is, each committee or working group that had staff support would have a single staff person assigned to it. That single staff person would do all of the staff support or see that it was done. Our new approach will be to organize staff support by function, not by committee.

What are some of these staff support functions? Reserving meeting spaces, printing and copying meeting materials, arranging phone and video hook-ups, arranging child care, taking and submitting minutes, submitting check requests, preparing and submitting travel reimbursement requests

Going forward, committee clerks or members will be asked to be more directly involved in doing these tasks, or for arranging for these tasks to be done by others. For example, previously a staff person, assigned to a committee, might be asked to arrange a conference call. That staff person would then need to go to another staff person who knows how to do that. Under the proposed new procedures, the committee clerk or member would be asked to contact directly the person who will actually arrange the conference call. The new "Administrative Procedures Handbook" will be the guidebook for clerks and members on what to do and whom to call or email. It has now been published and is operational.

Already we've had cries for help under the new plan. Last Friday, I received an email from a granting group clerk who said, "Would someone please give me a quick, concise lead as to where I go and how I arrange to set up a meeting using a Doodle Poll? All tutoring appreciated." Carol Walz, our Director of Grant Making, wrote back and shared the needed information. I suspect we will have many more pleas for help and we want to help, it's just that we will no longer be able to help in all of the old ways.

I'd like to thank Christie Duncan-Tessmer, our Associate Secretary for Program, for her work on these ideas. Christie and I have worked on them together, but it is her creative muse which has been at the source of them.

Other Aspects of Looking Forward

As I look forward to the year ahead, I confess that I am most excited about the prospect of being able to prioritize Yearly Meeting spiritual and community life issues, and monthly meeting and quarterly meeting issues, over concerns about our finances. Thinking about our finances will always be a part of my job, but in the coming year I look forward to their assuming a more rightful proportion among all other concerns.

As I mentioned above, a big piece of our work this coming year will be to figure out how best to support the work of the Yearly Meeting with a smaller staff. We will be living into this challenge as we go along. In the words of the song, we will be living up to the light we have believing that as we do more light will be given to us.

As I come to the end of my report, I would like to share with the meeting some of the issues with which I grapple on a regular basis as your General Secretary

One issue I wrestle with is the tension in the Yearly Meeting between those I would call "activist Friends" and those who might be called "non-activist Friends." Activist Friends, for example, wonder why the Yearly Meeting is not being more proactive in its

support of Occupy Philadelphia, or EQAT's campaign against PNC Bank and mountain top removal, and non-activist Friends are upset because Friends Center has allowed Occupy Philadelphia to use its buildings, and others wonder why the Yearly Meeting seems so anti-business. All of the people involved are friends of mine, and many wonder why I don't see things exactly their way. The vision I hold is that PYM is a big tent which includes sincere and committed Quakers with many different kinds of concerns and that we need to keep reaching for how to live together, and thrive, in a diverse religious community.

Related to the activist, non-activist tension is a concern that comes to me from time to time that our meetings don't feel very safe for different political points of view- like are Republicans welcome? This fall I will ask Support and Outreach Standing Committee to consider a statement that lifts up the idea that the Yearly Meeting is a big tent politically, and in other ways, and welcomes all in our diversity.

Another issue I deal with is a continuing sense of disconnect between our meetings and the Yearly Meeting. I am aware that this has been a long standing concern within the Yearly Meeting, evidence for which I can trace back to 1978. It's an issue that we tried to address with the meeting relations program, but that program has now been laid down. It's an issue that is always on my front burner.

A related issue I work with is whether staff energy, to the extent we have choices, should be directed in support of Yearly Meeting committees, or whether it should be focused on working directly with monthly meetings and quarterly meetings. I have been leaning heavily in the direction of wanting to focus available staff time on working directly with meetings, but this matter may need more discernment.

Yet another issue to which I give attention is the question of what should leadership from the General Secretary look like? Where does the Yearly Meeting expect the General Secretary to take leadership, or not? A place this has come up for me recently is in the work I have been doing on the topic of Quaker beliefs, a matter that I have been asked to present on Saturday. I'm not suggesting that there is a clear and unambiguous answer to the question of what does right leadership look like, but I want to share with the meeting that this is a question that is always with me. The meeting should know that I seek to get the Quaker leadership dilemma just right- not too little and not too much, and always with good spiritual grounding and abundant consultation.

With respect to any or all of these issues, I invite and welcome Friends engaging with me and sharing their thinking.

“With Divine guidance...”

In conclusion, I like to lift up three words to be found near the beginning of my job description: “With Divine guidance...”

This is a real concept for me. I may not always know how Spirit is at work in my life or in the life of our Yearly Meeting, but I do know that I am always in need of Divine guidance and my constant prayer is that what I think and do and say will be guided by the Spirit. This would also be my prayer for our Yearly Meeting in the year ahead. May

we preface all we do with the words, "With Divine guidance," holding the expectation that all of our work will be Spirit-led.

Dear Friends, I look forward to the year ahead. I look forward to what I know will be its challenges and rewards, but most of all I look forward to the joy of working together to build God's world as best we know how to do it.

Respectfully submitted, Arthur M. Larrabee, General Secretary