

Quarterly Meeting Revitalization Report to Annual Sessions 2014

Report to 2014 Annual Session from June 7, 2014 Gathering of Quarters

In May 2013, at their annual weekend retreat at Camp Swatara, Caln Quarter heard of a potential change in the PYM youth program. The PYM youth program had intersected with Caln Quarter's annual retreat for the last third of a century. With some potential changes in the PYM youth program, Caln Quarter faced a question of its purpose and possible change. A small group of Caln Quarter Friends contacted other quarters and asked about their activities. Each quarter has a different level of engagement and vitality. Out of these short explorations, a leading arose to invite Friends from across the Yearly Meeting with a passion about the life of our quarters to a gathering.

Friends involved in quarters (clerks, coordinators, ex-coordinators, and others) were invited to an organizing conference call in January. Within a few weeks, an ad hoc group had formed and we had determined a location, developed an agenda, distributed a flyer, and started to consider logistics.

Planners mentioned a number of ideas, felt needs as the planning progressed:

1. fostering inter-visitation and cross-communication
2. creating community among our quarters
3. identifying what we have in common as quarters that is different from monthly meetings or yearly meetings
4. hearing about the life of our quarters
5. providing small group opportunities of clerks, coordinators, clerks of committees
6. addressing the challenges of getting participation in our quarters
7. identifying and requesting resources of Yearly Meeting to support our quarters
8. discussing youth issues
9. utilizing meeting enrichment services
10. exploring how we might all support one another and create a new vision of what our quarters can do and be
11. determining whether quarters can generate a critical mass and quarterly meeting identity for our youth (elementary through Young Adult Friend) by organizing regional gatherings and transporting our youth to PYM youth programs
12. asking whether the historical purpose of the quarter is still valid today, and in what ways the purpose of a quarterly meeting has changed over time
13. exploring ways quarterly meetings might join together in some specific efforts by region (like the Tri-Quarterly gathering in NJ)
14. discerning whether quarterly meetings could have a stronger role in identifying leadership in the yearly meeting (perhaps revitalizing this role in some quarters is more to the point)

Reading Monthly Meeting was chosen as the gathering location because of its geographic centrality in the yearly meeting: about equidistant from Wellsboro Monthly Meeting (Upper Susquehanna Quarter) and Wicomico River Friends Meeting (Southern Quarter).

The Gathering took place on June 7, 2014 at Reading Meeting with 33 participants from nine quarters (Abington, Bucks, Caln, Chester, Concord, Haverford, Philadelphia, Upper Susquehanna, Western). The agenda included limited time for worship during the six hours of time together. In the morning, a threshing session yielded six topics. Over lunch, sub-groups formed around these six topics for further discernment. The sub-groups reported out and a summary minute was read. The six sub-groups were:

1. Roles and Responsibilities of monthly meetings, quarterly meetings, and yearly meeting
2. Declining Membership
3. Supporting Our Youth
4. Fostering Leadership
5. Working Across Communities
6. Spiritual Enrichment/Formation

Handouts of the notes from the six sub-groups are available.

A Summary Minute of the June 7 Gathering was developed. [attached]

We felt the June 7 Gathering was meaningful for the following reasons:

1. We had a start to sharing ideas across quarters.
2. We shared a desire to continue to meet over time and develop the ideas gathered at this meeting.
3. The scale of quarter work is meaningful because quarters are more local to monthly meetings, therefore more connected in practical and cultural ways than Yearly Meeting and its cross-pollination of practices. Social activism and spiritual support at the quarter level can be informal and fluid.
4. We are interested in exploring ways that the work from the June 7 gathering can plug into the larger work of the yearly meeting.
5. We want to get clearer at all levels as to how all of our work plugs into the larger work between monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings.
6. We believe that: "It is time that we further explore concrete ways to integrate the structure, energy, and community between monthly meetings, quarterly meetings, and the yearly meeting."

A future Gathering of Quarters will continue enlivening and expanding the themes based on the work started on June 7.

Questions about this report should be directed to:

John Hayden

jbhayden1@gmail.com

Summary Minute of the June 7 Gathering on Revitalizing our Quarterly Meetings

Members from nine quarterly meetings gathered at Reading Monthly Meeting on June 7, 2014 to affirm the role and importance of our quarters. There was a sense of community and belonging to each other.

We converged upon the truth that regional gatherings can be a place where Yearly Meeting becomes relevant. The quarterly meeting experience is an inspirational intermediary between monthly meetings and our wider yearly meeting community. When we come together, we collectively fuel our excitement about being Quakers.

We also considered the life in our quarterly meetings as it relates to leadership, youth support, membership, roles and responsibilities, working across our communities, and spiritual formation. As we adjourned, we affirmed the value of fellowship, worship, and sharing in love towards the development of new ideas and the seasoning of others. It is time that we further explore concrete ways to integrate the structure, energy, and community between monthly meetings, quarterly meetings, and the Yearly Meeting.