

Report of the General Secretary

Annual Sessions, July 31, 2015

Early in my tenure with Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, when I was the Children's Religious Life Coordinator, my supervisor Tom Hoopes put signs on the office doors of everyone on our team that said, simply: START. At a team meeting he shared with us the sentiment that an essential step in getting something done is to *start*. With the appointment of a new General Secretary and the approval of a new Five Year plan, which includes a new governance structure, the past year presented opportunities for many starts. This report provides some highlights and reflections.

GenSec* Initiatives

We are our yearly meeting, Friends. Every one of us in each of our 105 meetings and living in this four state region *is* PYM. We have committees and granting groups and, soon, Councils, Collaboratives and more structures to support our work. We have a legacy of money from Friends in our past who were committed to the community. We have several buildings, we have staff. None of these things *are* the yearly meeting, rather they support the yearly meeting. They support us as we live in a powerful community that strives to live from the center of the Divine, holding one another accountable in love. We are PYM.

There were several initiatives in the past year to help share this message as an experience:

- **How Does the Truth Fare with Thee?** This query is a traditional Quaker practice of inquiring into Friends' spiritual conditions. Friends in the yearly meeting stepped into this early tradition and into spiritual relationship with one another by asking their F/friends variations on this query.
- **Intervisitation:** We all were invited to visit at least two other PYM meetings during the year to experience the breadth and depth of our community. This is another traditional Quaker practice.
- **GenSec Visitation:** My goal was to worship with an average of two PYM meetings each month. Since September I have visited 25 monthly meetings and worship groups and 6 quarterly meetings.
- **GenSec Tour 2014:** Last November, all Friends were invited to a baked potato potluck at one of five locations in the yearly meeting for fellowship and to hear about the directions and purpose of the extended family of Friends called PYM.

These activities were highly visible, tangible events and moments that help illustrate a way of being together as a community. In themselves they may not be very significant but they point to an inclusive path that Friends resonate with highly. This is a direction that I believe will make a difference in our success as a community and our ability to financially support ourselves. Next steps will include growing our community and our impact in the world.

Implementation of our Structure and Strategic Directions

The Implementation Committee worked since February, tirelessly at times and with deserved fatigue at other times, to translate the Five Year Plan into action. It has focused primarily on the clear desire of PYM Friends to have a simplified structure which resulted in the fourth direction, *Simplify and Strengthen Governance and Administration*.

Defining the structures (Councils, Collaboratives, Threads, Sprints, Resource Friends, Committees and Bridge Contacts) has been a pivotal aspect of the work that Implementation Committee will have to do. The

substructures (those structures under the councils) provide a compelling reason as well as opportunity to be involved in the wider family of Friends. We are working to ensure that the structures are accessible and well used. A description of the substructures and how Friends can access them is currently available. A handbook describing the authority, accountability, responsibilities and available resources to all structures will be complete in September.

Another facet of the Implementation Committee's work that is essential to get right is Continuing Sessions. Continuing Sessions (the one-day sessions when everyone in the whole community comes together for worship, common ministry and spiritual fellowship) needs to provide three essential experiences. It needs to be inviting to Friends from every meeting of every age who carry ministries of every kind, it needs to provide a common ground for all those people and leadings to synchronize into a single experience of community and it needs to provide an experience that Friends will walk away from inspired to live deeply into the spiritual center together in community. The Implementation Committee, in tandem with staff, is doing all it can to set the stage so that the first Continuing Sessions is overwhelmingly successful. That will then prepare the way for all that comes next, including effective use of substructures and manifesting the kin-dom of God on earth. Mark your calendar: November 7 at Westtown School.

One difficult part of the transition has been the need to lay down old structures to prepare room to raise up the new ones. Many people have been involved in the yearly meeting committees and working groups over many years. With the support of those structures, Friends have given vital momentum and faithful service. Because the time horizon did not allow for developing the details of the new structures before steps needed to be taken to lay down the old ones, Friends feel the effect of the uncertainty. I acknowledge the sense of loss and I'm grateful for the patience, graciousness and helpfulness of Friends as we transition.

The staff has been integrally involved in thinking through the logistical, programmatic, financial and communications support that the new structures will require. We want to ensure the success and the sustainability of the supports. Some of this preparatory work is described in sections of this report below.

Throughout the year as I have visited with Friends and worked with the Implementation Committee my continuous experience has been that with each step there is energy, excitement and a willingness to walk in the unknown to develop our path. I find it incredibly inspiring.

Broadening Engagement and Deepening Connection

The fifth strategic direction in our Five Year Plan is to broaden engagement among Friends in our community and to deepen our connection with those who are engaged. This is central to the work of staff and it is a strategic direction that we could act on immediately. This perspective asks us not to prioritize solely getting more people involved but to think about how we communicate with Friends, how we invite participation and how we structure resources and programs so that they are usable by a wide variety of people who come from a wide variety of places – figuratively and literally. The Youth & Young Adult programs are broadening their reach by beginning to partner with monthly and quarterly meetings in their planning. We have begun re-thinking print communications, we have used our development efforts to invite Friends into the activity of the community and we have provided contextual information about our finances. The GenSec Tour took place in three different states, none of the Thread Gatherings were in Philadelphia and we have added an interactive conversation function to our website. The new structure and the format of the substructures such as Collaboratives and Sprints will also provide ways for individuals to engage with others in our extended Family around their ministry and interests.

Communications

Our communications initiatives connect us across our geography and they respond to the needs identified by Friends in the second strategic direction: Connect Friends across the yearly meeting through effective communications and technologies.

- PYM Connect offers a single webpage to find the current news, events and conversations that are active in our community.
- Online Conversations is a feature that debuted in the spring which allows us to connect and share with one another, regardless of where we live.

These initiatives are creating a space for sharing the experience, value and inspiration of being in community – rather than simply reporting on it.

Two years ago at an annual meeting that our clerk called of the Quarterly Meeting and Standing Committee clerks I heard a lot of concern for the lack of connection through communications. This year at that meeting the message was the polar opposite. Friends felt there were multiple ways of being in touch – that they could go to the website and they could receive e-newsletters and notifications that gave them the information they needed. It was enormously gratifying. It was also fascinating because at that point nothing had significantly changed in the intervening year. It simply took that long for the initiatives of a few years ago to saturate and become expected and used. Our current initiatives have been received with much affirmation for their relevance and usefulness. We are working hard to expedite the natural saturation period so that these initiatives can serve us well and quickly.

Finances

Our balance sheet and our financial process are solid. Three year budgeting, well-stocked reserves and quarterly reporting help us maintain a strong financial base. We have focused this year on communicating clearly what our budget is used for. Some examples of that focus include:

- Our annual communication to meetings about their contributions (the covenants) included a report on how funding is used.
- A magazine-style narrative to accompany the proposed 2016 budget to help Friends know what the numbers represent.
- In tandem with the work of implementing a new structure, a re-organization of the budget to represent the alignment between the financial resources and who has responsibility for managing them.

Another focus of this year has been consideration of the distribution rate for our funds invested at Friends Fiduciary Corporation (Fiduciary). Our yearly meeting has an increasingly strong relationship with Fiduciary and we worked hard together around the topic of distribution rates. I'm grateful for its expertise and relationship with PYM. In 2016 Fiduciary is lowering its distribution by a quarter percent to 4.25%, followed by another decrease to 4% in 2017. PYM is trustee for 63% of our investments at Fiduciary and for those funds it is our responsibility to determine the distribution rate that is wise both in terms of long term investment strategies and current needs. We did an enormous amount of research, back testing and predictive modeling to inform our decision to maintain the current distribution rate rather than decrease it for 2016. The results of that work are on the PYM website.

It is important to note the progress and change in financial support for two of our properties: Arch Street Meeting House and Burlington Meeting House and Conference Center. Each of these is moving in the direction of increased financial independence. The Arch Street Meeting House Preservation Trust held its first fundraiser

this past year which raised over \$20,000. It also approved a strategic plan which will support the continuation of this forward momentum. More details of their work is available in their report to Annual Sessions. The trustees of the Burlington Meeting House are halfway through our three year plan toward independence. Using all volunteer power they are successfully operating the meeting house. The efforts of both of these groups increase the dynamism of the buildings and decrease the load on our finances.

In addition to our investments our income primarily comes from the covenants (the contributions from our monthly meetings) and the annual fund (the contributions from individuals). While enthusiasm about the activity and community within our yearly meeting has been high, our individual giving is significantly down. In 2011, during our most significant financial crunch, Friends gave more than in previous years or since – we rose to the challenge. That is a fabulous strength and yet our need for financial support for the work we do as a community does not decrease when we are humming along. In PYM, we have seen that the most effective approach to raising money is when Friends in the yearly meeting ask other Friends to support our community financially. We are increasing the ways in which we use this approach. Because our fiscal year has changed, we have three more months to raise money for Fiscal Year 15. Friend, have you given to the yearly meeting this year? Have you invited others in your Quaker community to give?

Addressing Racism

In January our yearly meeting affirmed that we are committed to moving forward with our entire community to increase our consciousness as Friends about the intersection of privilege and race in our culture and in our spiritual community and to integrate this work in an ongoing way at the yearly meeting level.

The clerk has included engaging in this work in each agenda at Interim Meeting and resources for meetings have been posted on the website and sent to the meetings. At Annual Sessions this year careful consideration has been given to providing information, education, experience and support around this ministry throughout the week. A collection of Friends came together first at Sessions last year and then throughout the year who feel, as individuals and corporately, the Spirit powerfully rising among them as they work to undo racism. This Undoing Racism Group has formed working groups to address Learning Communities, Supporting Friends of Color, Connecting with Communities of Color, and creating an Undoing Racism Network. They sponsored the film “I’m Not Racist...Am I?” and a weekend retreat for Friends of Color and their families. The PYM staff has just begun to work with a consultant to transform our workplace to be a truly inclusive and equitable staff community. The work of becoming a truly just, anti-racist community is ongoing and will live at the forefront of our staff community. It will be a lens through which we relate to our work of “broadening engagement and deepening relationship.” The coming work is far more than a learning experience or a training. It affects the way we see ourselves, one another and our community.

In Summary

The year was full of starts as we began the process of changing our structure which prompted changes in communications, finances and program. As those aspects are in motion we are also attending to the effects of racism in our culture and society so that as the changing aspects shift into new forms we are integrating the ministry of undoing racism.

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General Secretary