

## General Secretary Report to PYM Annual Sessions

August 1, 2021

In 2014 our yearly meeting approved six strategic directions and charged the Implementation Committee with forming a seventh (read them all on the final page). Those directions have guided us to define a shape of our yearly meeting. This report shares that shape in three sections. The first section is about our purpose, the second is about the shape itself and the third is about goals for the upcoming year. All of these come from the strategic directions and were able to be articulated this past year for the first time.

### Section One: Who, What, Why

The strategic directions didn't spring from a mission statement that describes who we are, why we exist and what we do. They came from deep listening to Friends in a worshipful space in many formats over several years. The Long Range Planning Committee was able to discern these directions from the patterns reflected in all of the sharing and worshiping. To support the focus of our work, staff reverse-engineered the seven strategic directions to see what they pointed to regarding our purpose. From this came a group of six words and phrases which are each described below.



The yearly meeting supports **PYM Quakers and Quaker communities in PYM**. This means Friends who are actively engaged in and/or committed to a PYM meeting (monthly or quarterly) and Friends who are actively engaged in and/or are committed to a community within PYM (such as Young Adult Friends). There is no language distinguishing between members and attenders. It is notable that the strategic directions do not point our attention toward could-be Friends or seekers.

**PYM connects.** Repeatedly, throughout the strategic directions, we are asked to connect Quakers and Quaker communities: "Connect Friends and Meetings to one another," "Connect Friends through communications and technologies," "encourage and support one another," "we are interconnected." The yearly meeting is a container and can uniquely bring individuals, meetings and groups and ministries together within it.

We connect Quakers and Quaker communities to experience our **life as faith and practice**. The moments of our individual and corporate lives are centered and fed by being responsive to the experience of the Divine and guided by our testimonies. A life centered in faith and practice is one engaged in worship, discernment and decision-making in the manner of Friends, faith formation (aka religious education), witness to and expression of justice and being accountable to God with one another.

**The strategic directions suggest three adjectives: vibrant, inclusive, and interdependent.**

When **our community is vibrant**, the people and activity shine out and draw people and energy toward it. This radiance and gravity are regenerative and keeps itself going. Its existence feeds its existence. Those who are engaged have a sense of responsibility for maintaining and growing and following the Life experienced.

When **our community is one of belonging**, the voice, imagery, needs, gifts, and love of all people are expressed, welcomed, and received. The way we function reflects the value of belonging when the activity, opportunity, resources, and decision-making are such that they are engaged in by all people.

When **our community is interdependent**, we are all shaped by other Quakers, meetings, and groups. The presence and activity of the people and community impact the way our extended family, the yearly meeting, functions while simultaneously the presence and activity of the yearly meeting impacts people and communities. Relationships and accountability are nurtured among people and among communities

There are two sentences in our book of Faith & Practice that describe the yearly meeting: *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting is an extended network of Friends. This community exists to hold and amplify, deepen, and nurture the experience of Spirit and everyone's talents and involvement help make that happen* (page 71). These sentences line right up with our strategic directions to show us the purpose of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

## Section Two: The Shape

The purpose of the yearly meeting shapes how we function and focus. It is expressed through three spheres: Connecting Friends, Shared Concerns, and Everyday Quaker Living.

### PYM CONNECTS FRIENDS & MEETINGS

The yearly meeting connects Friends, meetings, groups, and ministries across our geography. We connect individuals who have shared callings and interests, such as ecojustice. We connect individuals who have shared identities, such as middle school age Friends. We connect through programs and events that speak to our needs, our joys and where we are ready to grow. We connect through many forms of communications, including weekly emails to all Friends, a website that shares news and events of all that is happening in our region, beautiful graphics, and print mailings. The staff supports all these ways of coming together for whatever purpose arises.

### PYM SPEAKS TO SHARED CONCERNS

One of our Strategic Directions is to facilitate PYM-wide witness and social action. As seekers of Truth, we expect to be called to action. This Direction asks us to enhance our effectiveness by focusing our yearly meeting-wide action on a few, clear concerns and to encourage and support one another in taking risks together, as we make an impact on our society. My experience of this Direction is that God used it to tell us to Get Ready because we are about to be called to do some vital work together. We

didn't ever settle into a discernment process to seek what that calling might be – three concerns were handed to us, one after another: Address racism, create space for belonging, and interrupt climate change. This Annual Sessions shows us how we've been preparing and puts the three concerns in front of us to take concrete next steps.

#### PYM SUPPORTS EVERYDAY QUAKER LIFE

Our yearly meeting provides ourselves with resources and services that support the ongoing logistics and relationships for Friends, meetings, groups, and ministry. Our daily, individual, and corporate (of the body) experience and routine is supported by PYM's Faith & Practice and our decisions at our annual and continuing sessions. Everyday all of us attend to how we nurture our capacity for ministry and care, spiritual formation, peace & social justice, outreach & communications, governance & stewardship of our resources. None of us do this alone and the talents and involvement of our extended family of Friends deepens our capacities.

### Section Three: Goal Areas for the Upcoming Year

We move in the direction the strategic directions call us. Focusing on specific areas within those directions helps us do first what needs to be done first and then build from there. There are four goal areas that the staff is focusing on for the upcoming year. The choice of these four is based on a number of things. They are entirely formed within the strategic directions. They related to the goals set by the councils for themselves. They are based on the experience of staff. These are called goal areas rather than goals so they can be broad enough to be adopted and used regardless of whether someone is working with children, communications, design, or budgets.

#### Guide Friends who are "Aware" of PYM toward being "Actively Engaged"

This goal directs our focus as we encourage connection within Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. There is a continuum of engagement that begins with Friends who don't know PYM exists and stretches to Friends who are active every week in a leadership capacity. **Aware** Friends refers to those who know the yearly meeting exists and we know they know because they have chosen to receive weekly emails or they gave money once or attended an event. The goal is to encourage these Friends to become **Actively Engaged**. At that point they will be attending several programs in a year or always going to Sessions, they might consistently contribute financially or contribute news stories about their meeting to the website. We are not trying to move everybody one level deeper, we are not trying to make sure every single Friend is aware of PYM – although of course we're not resisting that either. This goal is a matter of deliberately focusing on attending to the way we communicate, the programs we offer, connect with donors, choose images, make things available on the website with an eye toward further engaging the Aware.

**Make clear the essential role of meetings to one another and to PYM**

Quakerism generally and our current governance structure specifically is guided by the understanding that we can better know God and be faithful to the movement of the Spirit when we are in the community of Friends, meetings, and ministries. As the councils focus on their connection and listening to meetings, the work of staff will help illuminate our community's interdependence so we can clearly see it.

**Center marginalized populations of Friends to develop PYM capacity for diverse participation**

Our youth and the young adult Friends in our community are our future. They are also our present. A present community that is organized to meet the needs and joys and gifts of younger Friends - a community that is made for them and by them - will be one where they will thrive and where others will want to join them. This goal asks us to put at the center of our work the Friends who tend to be marginalized in the world and in our community: younger Friends, Black, Indigenous, and Friends of Color, LGBTQ+ Friends, and Friends with disabilities.

**Hold space for re-opening with attention to rest and healing**

It's not news that the last year put everyone through the wringer – in the world, in our personal lives and in our religious community. As we head into the next year, last year doesn't disappear. The strain and grief doesn't evaporate. Additionally, while gathering in person again is lovely it comes with its own stressors. This goal is about paying attention to understanding that we are tired and the next year brings more things that can make us more tired. The way we do what we do needs to pay attention to giving us space to have all the feelings and to have all the spaciousness to gain strength together.

## **In Closing**

The way we are called to be in the world may change. I think it's likely that after we have deep practice and understanding of belonging, we will be ready to welcome in seekers in a whole new way and that we will find that's how we're called – but that isn't what is in front of us right now as the primary ways to live and move. Additionally, the way individual Friends, meetings and groups are called or choose to act may be in addition to to the strategic directions, the purpose and shape and goals of our community and work. As a people we continuously look for what is revealed newly to us.

While we remain open to continuous revelation, we also hold the discipline of expecting to have an impact in a long-term capacity. To do that we need to be faithful to the way we are called toward a longer view. Our strategic directions help us maintain that focus.

## 2014 Strategic Directions

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### **Connect Friends and meetings to one another so that we may experience vibrant, Spirit-led faith community.**

We will share among us the wisdom, creativity, and resources of our meetings and Friends, so they may resonate throughout the whole community and allow us to thrive in relationship with the Divine. Individuals and meetings will give time, gifts, and experience in service, and in turn receive new insight, grounding, and friendships, directly and indirectly enriching their meetings and their own spiritual lives.

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### **Simplify and focus on governance and administration.**

We will use our finite resources of volunteer time and energy to focus primarily on God's work and to sustain our extended community. This process will simplify our structure and processes, clarify roles, responsibilities, authority, and accountability, and reduce the number of things we do. Thus, we will create new opportunities for access and participation, open to anyone with the skills, experience, and will to serve, regardless of time and travel limitations.

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### **Connect Friends across the yearly meeting through effective communications and technologies.**

We will connect Friends across the geography of PYM and with Friends from the wider world, in order to carry our concerns together. We will do this in a manner that allows everyone, without traveling, to participate in the life of the community.

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### **Broaden engagement and deepen relationships in our yearly meeting.**

Because we are all interconnected, we seek to increase a sense of belonging to an extended family of Friends. To be effective and whole, we need each other. Our personal experience of being a Friend is deepened by worshipping, discerning business, and sharing community beyond our home meetings. Friends of all ages, locations, and interests will have ways of entering the community and will feel glad they've participated.

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**Develop and widely communicate clear messages about Quakers and PYM.**

We will send boldly into the world the message of our distinctive Quaker faith and practice, so that we are known not only for our historic witness but also for our present action, encouraging others to join us, and so that all may be inspired.

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**Facilitate PYM-wide corporate witness and social action.**

As seekers of Truth, we expect to be called to action. Together, as a PYM community, we will witness to the Light, contributing to transformational work in the world. We will encourage and support one another in taking risks together, as we make an impact on our society. We will enhance our effectiveness by focusing our corporate action on fewer, clearer goals.

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**Ensure our communities are welcoming and safe for all people.**

We will look courageously into the roots of inequity in our culture, be willing to see and feel the pain it can cause, and choose to do whatever is necessary to take risks and to change. We will dismantle imposed barriers in our yearly and monthly meeting structures and activities, which impede our experience of God within our communities and within ourselves. We seek to make the congregations inside of our meetinghouses reflect the beauty and diversity of the world outside of them.