

PYM Discernment and Expectations

Preparing for Annual Sessions in the following ways will help us listen better as we seek unity wherever the spirit leads.

Read advance documents provided by the Yearly Meeting

An important part of the process of corporate discernment takes place earlier, in the committees of PYM, which are charged with seasoning an issue before it is brought to sessions for consideration. Advance material might include background information - or information regarding the process, resources, and methods used to season and develop recommendations. If available prior to the start of sessions, reports are provided electronically after online registration and posted on the PYM website. Reports are made available in hard copy on the resource table on the day of sessions.

Before Annual Sessions, Friends need to read and reflect on the information provided to form thoughtful questions or insights that help lead the PYM body to unity.

Listen attentively and be spiritually receptive during sessions

All those attending PYM sessions should seek to release whatever preferences or opinions they may have about an issue before it is considered. Friends should be open to the leading of the spirit, as they would in a meeting for worship. The goal of this decision-making process is to discern God's will for PYM regarding the topic under consideration. Unity, rather than unanimity, is the goal. We consider ourselves to be in unity when we share in the search for Truth, when we listen faithfully for God, when we submit our wills to the guidance of spirit, and when our love for one another is constant.

The Quaker business method is a discipline that requires all present to be focusing on worship and discernment of the matter at hand. All members share responsibility for maintaining a spirit-led meeting, for the wise use of the allocated time, and for a steadfast search for Truth.

When led to speak, be brief without repeating messages of other Friends

Friends who feel led to speak should ask to be recognized by raising their hands; in Zoom business meetings Friends should raise their electronic hand. Once recognized by the Clerk, either wait for an usher to bring a microphone to you when in person, or, when on Zoom, unmute yourself. When offering spoken ministry, try to sum up what you have to say in as few words as possible. Speak simply and audibly. Each contribution should be heard in silence. Audible indications of approval or disapproval of spoken ministry are not part of Quaker practice.

After each contribution, allow a pause for reflection. If you have tested your ministry and feel that the PYM body needs to hear it in order to reach unity, then follow your leading to raise your hand and wait to be called on to speak.

The clerk listens for the sense of the meeting in the insights Friends offer and determines when to propose it to the group.

After the sense of the meeting is proposed, members may offer suggestions for its improvement. The clerk then tests the

sense of the meeting by asking whether the group can unite with it. If so, the meeting records the sense of the meeting the decision in a minute that is immediately read back to and approved by the meeting.

In Zoom meetings, we will only use the chat to communicate with Tech Support as will be outlined in our tech introduction at the opening of each session. For example, if someone is unable to share a message verbally, the message should be typed in the chat directly to an appointed staff person who will share that message (with attribution) when recognized by the clerk. We avoid split attention and parallel processes by not using the chat as a way to communicate in discernment.

Sessions Minutes

In March 2108, PYM agreed to return to the practice of documenting, reading aloud, and approving minutes during sessions. The traditional practice creates a sense of spiritual unity within the PYM body and eliminate delays in communicating information and decisions.

PYM session attendees play an important role in ensuring that we have sufficient time for discussion and discernment during sessions. Faith and Practice reminds us, “the meeting community itself uses defined processes to reach clearness in decisions and to guide the actions of the meeting. Spirit-led decision making is central to the life and health of the meeting.”

Exercise self-discipline when minutes are read for approval. Refrain from expecting to hear any specific comment included. Reflect on whether the minute is good enough and adequately captures the essence of the deliberation and sense of the meeting. Do not expect the minutes to be precisely as you would have drafted them. If you are clear that a change is necessary, raise your hand and wait to be called on by the clerk.

The PYM Sessions Minutes Sprint team was tasked by the Administrative Council in 2018 to develop and distribute training and orientation materials that can be used by monthly meetings, quarterly meetings, as well as at PYM Sessions. The Minutes Sprint plans to invites monthly meetings to participate in identifying the training and orientation materials needed and will solicit input on best practices in use today and ask for input on draft materials.