

PLENARY III (DRAFT)

The third plenary session of the 2009 annual gathering of PYM began at 2:45 p.m. with worship. The Presiding Clerk, Joe Franko, reminded us of the spirit of sensitive listening, respect, and openness from which we seek unity. He summarized the history of the proposal for a Youth Coordinator position, which began five years ago when Joe Franko and Jane Peers suggested to our Ministry and Oversight Committee that the time had come to consider hiring staff to strengthen the work of the Yearly Meeting. The proposal that we have before us today is the best prepared and most thoroughly seasoned this Presiding Clerk has seen.

Shane Lightner, convenor of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Youth Coordinator Proposal, reprised the process of consultation and seasoning that was carried out by the Committee during the past year, with extensive communication and visitation involving the monthly meetings and worship groups of PYM, our quarterly meetings, and other yearly meetings. He highlighted issues that were brought to the Committee and insights the Committee reached as it refined the proposal.

At the Presiding Clerk's request, the Recording Clerk read the minutes that were brought to our 2008 annual gathering by the Young Friends and by the Junior Friends. (See the minutes of Plenary Session VI, 2008 annual gathering.)

Our discernment process today began with a "fish bowl" discussion, in which Ad Hoc Committee members sat in a circle before the Clerks' table and Friends with questions or comments joined the circle to speak and hear the responses of Committee members.

A Friend asked that we hear the minute on this proposal that Orange County Monthly Meeting sent to the Ad Hoc Committee. After it was read, that Friend asked why this minute had not been read today. We were told that several minutes were sent to the Committee, which felt that it would be inappropriate to read a minute from one Meeting without reading the others. All are included among the appendices to the Proposal, which have been made available to all of us.

We learned that Sacramento Monthly Meeting recently minuted its support for the current proposal.

A Committee member asked us to take note of the dates of receipt of the appendices, and of how the questions, suggestions, and issues brought to the Committee changed over the year of seasoning.

A Friend informed us that the 15 individual letters of Appendix A.7, which were in the document made available to Friends previously, are not included in the printed version of the Appendices that is available today for review. We heard that the omission resulted from a technical difficulty. A complete copy was provided by a Friend who had brought her own copy.

The Committee was asked to tell us about funding suggestions they considered other than a simple increase to the annual per-member assessment, which would approximately double if the proposed \$38/per member increase is approved. In response, we were told that the Finance

Committee was involved in the Ad Hoc Committee's discussions early in the process and thereafter. Useful input came from other yearly meetings with youth programs, which had found it best to fund their programs by assessments of members because the basis of support came best from the monthly meeting level. The Committee also felt strongly that the Youth Coordinator should not be required to do fundraising. We heard that some yearly meetings have annual "askings" or other funding mechanisms, rather than assessments like ours.

In the spirit of a query we heard today, *How is truth advanced among you?*, a Friend asked how the ministry of our young Friends will be advanced for the benefit of this Yearly Meeting if this proposal is approved. A Young Friend spoke of the contributions Friends have made to important social changes throughout our history, and the questions he puts to himself about what he could do. Young Friends have a lot of energy to use, and they need guidance. Another Young Friend spoke of the dramatic impact her experience as a teenager in AFSC/SCQM projects had on her development as a Quaker, and her hope that PYM can provide similar experiences to other young people. An adult told us that when she first came to an annual gathering, as a young adult, a Friend advised her to connect with Young Friends. Although she initially felt somewhat insulted, she found that following this advice led to some of the most beneficial experiences she has had during the past nine years as her involvement in PYM has deepened. We need not fear that a strengthened youth program will foster isolation of young people from adult Friends; younger Friends need both integration with the larger Friends' community and time together with their peers.

Another adult told us that his own experience working with Quaker youth in the past has been valuable to him beyond any price. From the appendices, he read remarks from a Young Friend that attest to the broadening experiences and encounters with life and love that he gained from Quaker youth projects. That Young Friend lamented the loss to Quakerism of young people who might today be among us as active adult Friends had they, too, had such experiences.

A questioner asked if this proposal offers the flexibility needed to cope with concerns we have heard from Quaker families about safety and other matters in youth programs, as well as issues that may arise in the future that we have not foreseen. Committee members responded that the proposal is meant to be flexible, with arrangements and processes open to revision as we learn from experience. The Co-Clerk of JYM told us that the JYM Committee has received inquiries and concerns, has communicated with families and monthly meetings about them, and works on an on-going basis to address them. Among the responsibilities of the Coordinator will be visitation and communication with monthly meetings, seeking to understand why families with youth may not attend PYM so that programs can be responsive to their needs.

A Friend who did not receive the updated appendices wondered if many Friends did not receive them, and therefore unavoidably came to annual gathering unprepared. We learned that the appendices were posted to the PYM website eight days ago (about July 20). The Committee worked hard to compile the appendices and make them available in a timely way. If Friends need more time to review them, we should take that time. The proposal that we are asked to approve was available on July 1, 2009.

How many yearly meetings with youth coordinators have central staff, the Committee was asked, and how many pay their youth coordinator? We heard that every other yearly meeting that was contacted has at least some paid staff, although not all of them pay a youth coordinator. Our Presiding Clerk told us that when the idea of paid staff for PYM was initially raised five years ago, the general feeling was that if we were to have paid staff the first priority would be for a youth coordinator.

Citing implied costs of the proposal that seem not to be included in the proposed budget, such as support for the activities of a supervisor and supervisory committee, a Friend suggested that the actual cost may be about 10% higher than the proposed budget shows. Has the Committee considered these probable additional costs? We were told that the Committee had not budgeted those additional costs, being uncertain about what would be approved and how to estimate the costs. For example, the proposed supervisor may be able to accomplish a great deal by telephone inexpensively, with little travel.

The Presiding Clerk told us that following approval some time will be required to implement this proposal, and that the additional costs would probably be no greater than the savings from the annual budget in the first year due to that start-up time. Any proposal, he suggested, will need revision as we gain experience. We should not become mired in details, but rather ask ourselves if this is work that we are called by Spirit to do. He asked us to keep this in mind as we moved into worship with attention to business. The Clerk thanked the Ad Hoc Committee and Young Friends for their faithfulness, and for their dedicated work in this process.

A member of our Ministry and Oversight Committee reminded us of Biblical stories in which God asked his servants, Noah and Moses, to undertake completely improbable projects with little direction, faithful to the call they had received. Like them, we should move ahead. From their own experience and with the needs of their children in mind, one Friend after another urged us to proceed. A Friend who realized only recently that the Youth Coordinator would be expected to provide programs for Friends up to 35 years old as well as teens asked for an explanation of that age range. We heard a request for a firm commitment to respond to concerns about safety of young people at our gatherings, rather than the general statements the proposal now contains.

A young adult told us how important programs at Ben Lomond Quaker Center were to her during her teen years, anchoring her in difficult times. How much more emphatically could our young people be telling us what they need? She has traveled very far to be present with this community, she told us.

Money is not the issue, a Friend told us. If this is right for us to do, the money will be found. We need to realize that this program will require more, not less, of adults in Pacific Yearly Meeting. This Friend was concerned that she cannot assure Friends who consider themselves socially conservative that they can securely send their children to PYM. Expanded youth programs will require that we take on something very large, demanding a great deal of us all.

A young Friend who lives in an area with few young Friends affirmed the great value to her of events that bring young Friends together, and asked for more.

An adult who has long served in our youth programs shared his experience through the years, watching Quaker children mature and assume adult responsibilities, including seats at the clerks' table. The times have become more difficult for young people in many ways. This Friend was moved by the proposal and its possibilities as a step toward the future of this Yearly Meeting.

“How does this move the truth of this Yearly Meeting forward?”, a Friend asked. She described the bittersweet experience of a recent quarterly meeting, where a visiting youth coordinator led a wonderful intergenerational activity and then the youth and adults returned to their separate worlds. She longs to see us move forward together.

A parent whose children grew up in this yearly meeting, and who has lived through dark times when youth participation in annual gathering was low due to security concerns and has seen improvements, witnessed to her faith that this yearly meeting can move forward and make this work.

A Friend who wants to see more youth programs and more intergenerational programs wondered if a youth coordinator is the best way to bring this about. She cited her own meeting's series of youth gatherings that brought young people from other meetings together with those of her meeting, organized by different volunteers, as a model of what PYM might be able to do without a paid staff member. Wherever there is a suitable meeting house with interested Friends, such things can be done, but it would be helpful to have a youth programs committee and some funding. We could achieve the aims Friends have advocated today at lower cost.

From a grandmother who came this year with her 12-year old grandchild, we heard a request for inclusion of pre-teens in our youth programs, and also a passionate plea for programs for young Friends up to age 35, who need spiritual grounding and experience with Quaker process. This Friend believes that a Youth Coordinator could leverage the energy of our youth with great benefit. In her view, Friends in her Meeting would willingly increase their assessments to make that possible.

A Friend who has worked with youth in her quarter for at least 25 years told us that if Quakerism is to be her spiritual community, it must include her children. A PYM Youth Coordinator could provide what is missing from our annual gatherings and from SCQM, where people who are willing and able to do this work simply cannot be found.

The Presiding Clerk tested his perception that we have come to a deep unity, despite concerns that continue to float on the surface waters. He offered a minute for our consideration, and received suggested changes. A Friend who has long attended meetings for worship regularly with her children, and whose monthly meeting has minuted its opposition to this proposal, urged us to go more slowly, and to wait to act until there is real unity. A Young Friend with lifelong attendance at his monthly meeting told us that his understanding of Quakerism and the commitment he now feels came from experience at Pacific Yearly Meeting. Several Friends told us that they were required to leave the meeting to go to their children, and they asked that no decision be made on the minute the Clerk offered us.

In response, the Clerk informed us that he will circulate a minute for our consideration later in this annual gathering. We were told that the Ad Hoc Committee will provide complete copies of the Appendices in the quiet room, and that an interest group on this proposal has been scheduled for Wednesday evening at 6:45 p.m.

PYM 2009-n The minutes of Plenary III were read and approved.

Faithfully submitted,

Jamie Newton, Recording Clerk

Joe Franko, Presiding Clerk