

## PLENARY VIII (DRAFT)

The eighth plenary session of the 2009 annual gathering of PYM began at 1:20 p.m. with worship. Reading Clerk Susan Stanley read from the 2008 epistle of New England Yearly Meeting, where Friends felt the call to love one another weigh heavily upon them – to actually do it, to learn to love again and again, and to forgive one another. She read also from the epistle of the first-ever New England Young Friends camp. These Young Friends, conscious that their lives were in flux, wondered at and gave thanks for the natural beauties of their surroundings, but it was an unexpected inner response to this, their first corporate Sabbath, that brought them truly together, first in gathered meetings for worship and then in worshipful sharing after the planned hour of worship in response to the call of the spirit. Here they felt uplifted by a sense of spontaneous symphony where before there had been but a single oboe. They encouraged all Friends to try out this path into communion and community.

### Naming Report

Presiding Clerk Joe Franko read again the recommendations of our Naming Committee, which we had heard in Plenary II of this annual gathering.

**PYM 2009-n** Pacific Yearly Meeting approved the following Friends to serve on the Nominating Committee, with the terms indicated:

- 2010 Martha Hunkins (Humboldt)
- 2010 Keith Wedmore (San Francisco)
- 2011 D.J. Bloom (Appleseed), **Clerk**
- 2011 Ellie Huffman (Monterey Peninsula)
- 2012 David Barrows (San Diego)
- 2012 Chuck Orr (La Jolla)

### Nominating Committee

Stratton Jaquette, Clerk of the Nominating Committee, informed us that no additional nominees would be brought to us in this plenary session. Nominees who were brought to us in the sixth plenary session were returned to us for approval.

**PYM 2009-n** Pacific Yearly Meeting approved the following Friends for the positions and terms indicated:

[Insert list of nominees brought to Plenary 6.]

### Epistle Committee

Our Epistle Committee – Chris Mohr, Kitty Bergel, and Eli Fowler – presented a draft of the 2009 epistle. Friends were invited to share their thoughts with the Epistle Committee at an open meeting this evening over dinner.

## **Registrar's report**

Sherri Sisson, Registrar, thanked all who registered for the entire week. This change in PYM policy, and Friends' responses to it, so improved our process and gentled the tasks of the Registrar that she startled us by expressing her willingness to consider taking on this role a second time. Sherri thanked all who were involved in registration, including Dave and Kathy, The Conference Managers. Friends who are present but have not registered were urged to visit The Conference Managers' website and register. Approximately 329 people registered for the week, and 21 registered as day attenders. The Registrar's report is attached. [Appendix XXX]

## **Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)**

Anne Boone, Stephen Matchett, Jim Avera, Katherine Youngmeister, and Sharon Beckman described the work Friends are doing with the Alternatives to Violence Project, including extensive service within prisons since the California prison system began to welcome AVP workshops several years ago. AVP now has active programs in 16 state prisons, where approximately 130 workshops were conducted during the past year. A warden in one prison reported that the summer of 2008 was the calmest summer in many years in his institution, an improvement that he attributed directly to the benefits of AVP workshops.

AVP has succeeded in opening local community councils near some prisons, so that facilitators do not need to travel long distances to offer workshops. AVP has also connected with parolees, and some former prisoners now work with AVP as facilitators within the prisons. AVP is understood by these facilitators as an expression of our deepest Quaker values in the world – something we cannot own but to which we can open ourselves.

AVP encourages Friends to offer contributions of both money and time. Donations can be sent to Stephen Matchett, treasurer of AVP, which is a tax-deductible organization. AVP also invites Friends near the 16 prisons with AVP programs to offer hospitality to facilitators. (Currently, about half of AVP's costs are for lodging for facilitators.) AVP also offers workshops for teens through a program called HIPP (Help Increase the Peace Project).

## **Youth Coordinator Proposal**

The Presiding Clerk thanked a Friend whose concern led the Clerk to pause when he felt ready to ask for approval of the Youth Coordinator Proposal in an earlier plenary session. Friends have made very good use of the time afforded us by that pause, participating in an interest group and in other discussions that have strengthened the proposal. We have seasoned the ideas and issues reflected in this proposal for several years and in many ways. The Clerk asked that our consideration today begin with Friends who wished to address the proposal and had not spoken about it previously.

A monthly meeting representative whose meeting had not found unity in its consideration of the Youth Coordinator Proposal reminded us that established Friends organizations are experiencing severe funding shortfalls. He recommended that most of the funds proposed for a Youth Coordinator be allocated instead to AFSC and FCNL in this time of crisis, with perhaps one fifth

of the proposed budget being used for youth programs of PYM. A Friend with long experience in Quaker service, including AFSC, reminded us that our process is to share in discernment here at our annual gathering, rather than to represent any other viewpoint or Friends' body. We have long experience with the inadequacy of reliance for our youth programs on inconsistent efforts by volunteers, despite the best of intentions and their great skill. We have minuted our approval of this position in principal. Now we need to move from that expression of intent to implementation. This Friend urged us to support our Friends' organizations, but to keep faith with our youth by providing the youth coordinator they have so fervently requested.

A Friend whose small monthly meeting is unsure how it will meet this year's budget urged us to approve this proposal with faith that we will find our way. A pregnant Friend whose monthly meeting has neither children nor a children's program has felt apprehensive about the place her family will have in her meeting after their child is born. She and her husband have committed themselves to remain with that monthly meeting, but they need help to create a program for their own child and other children they hope their monthly meeting will attract.

We heard expressions of the dilemmas faced by families who have been drawn to PYM by their children's eagerness, yet have felt deterred by adult anxiety about what the children are likely to encounter at annual gatherings and about what will not be available for them. A Friend who grew up in PYM and returned because of the deep love she holds for Friends of this Yearly Meeting lamented the absence of many whom she had hoped to see at our annual gathering. She hopes that a Youth Coordinator can foster the energy and commitment that will keep Friends within this Quaker community from youth onward.

A Friend with many years of strong commitment to our children and involvement in PYM programs for youth said that at our 2008 annual gathering she felt derogated and pressured when she expressed her concerns about this proposal, and treated as if she did not care about the children of this Yearly Meeting. She asked if this is what we want to model for our children – the atmosphere of a political campaign, in which people cheer for what they support and attempt to overwhelm any opposition.

Reminding us that in our search for unity and our eagerness to move forward we must never forget to treat one another with love and tenderness, our Clerk asked us to settle again into worship. Citing a recent experience at FGC, with leadership shared by all age groups and designated listeners in one session, another Friend asked us not to lose sight of the importance of listening to one another.

Perhaps what we are calling a Youth Coordinator might be more appropriately called a Community Coordinator, a Friend suggested. We have among us many colors of yarn, and it seems as though perhaps we are trying to hire a weaver. We might better think of what we are doing as purchasing a loom kit. We are the weavers, seeking what we need to weave our many threads into a single beautiful fabric. We often learn best about our own faith by explaining it to others, especially to others younger than ourselves. We all need to be involved in this weaving.

A Friend who came to Quakerism as a teenager is now, in his fifties, among the youngest members of his monthly meeting. Serving on our Nominating Committee, he told us that he

often hears adult Friends decline requests to serve because they lack the time and energy. Families with two adults often need two incomes to make ends meet. We seem to fear hiring anyone to do anything at all, and we need a person to coordinate us in those very forms of volunteer service for which we have heard so many calls.

A teenaged friend told us that last year, for two weeks after our annual gathering many teens came to worship at his monthly meeting – something that had never happened before. He felt a sense of community with them similar to what he had felt at annual gathering, but never before at his own meeting.

A Friend suggested that our reluctance to approve this proposal comes primarily from the fact that this will cost us a lot of money. His monthly meeting considered this, decided that they were willing to stand the cost, and sent a letter to that effect. He asked us to be tender toward meetings that have not felt ready to bear this cost, and hoped our Finance Committee could find a way to help such meetings ease into this new level of financial support. The Clerk of our Finance Committee told us that some ideas have been offered with recognition that some monthly meetings are struggling to make their own budgets, but he did not think it is in the province of the Finance Committee to devise a plan that would differentiate among monthly meetings based on apparent ability to contribute to PYM's funding.

A Friend whose small monthly meeting struggles with finances and had minuted its opposition to the proposal told us that changes have taken place since that minute was approved. The age range to be served by the Youth Coordinator has been expanded to include Friends as young as middle school, resolving the Meeting's concern about the age limitations of the program, and in consultation with the Ad Hoc Committee on the Youth Coordinator Proposal the Clerk of her Meeting has concluded that this monthly meeting can find a way to provide its share of the costs. This Friend believes her Meeting is now ready to move forward with the current proposal.

The Presiding Clerk tested the sense of the meeting. Citing his concern about risks of several kinds that could cause the proposed position to fail, and his yearning for our youth programs to be life changing and successful, one Friend told us in detail why he could not unite with this minute. A second Friend told us that she shared his views, and that she has deep reservations about institutionalizing our youth programs. A third told us that she also could not unite with this proposal while others felt strongly opposed. Our Clerk told us that the sense of this meeting is clear to him. Spirit is requiring this of us. We may discover a year from now that this was a mistake, but our Finance Committee has told us that Pacific Yearly Meeting can weather such a mistake.

A Young Friend asked us to make this decision not on the basis of whether we think we have the money, but on the basis of whether this decision is right and necessary. The young people of this yearly meeting need to be brought into the light of Quakerism in a world that bombards them with so many other influences. They need our commitment.

“I need to confess an error,” a Friend cried out to us. He recounted some of his more than 30 years of advocacy for youth and service to Quaker youth programs. A year ago, he tried to minimize his anxiety about the difference between the terms “coordination” and “coordinator.”

Since then, he has asked for deeper involvement in dialogue on the proposal and sought without effect to bring attention to alternatives, such as the youth program committee that was recently established by North Pacific Yearly Meeting. In his judgment, the proposal before us is not the right way to go, and we do not have unity at this time to approve it.

Again, our Presiding Clerk returned us to worship.

“The funny thing about fears is that their number one job is to make us think they are real,” a Friend told us. “Fears matter, but they are not real.” She acknowledged the fears she has heard, and the power of those fears – that we won’t have enough money, that we will fail, that if we don’t approve this proposal our youth will walk away. We have a plan, but it is just a plan, put together by our trusted Friends. If it fails, we will remain together. We are a community that can survive even if what we fear comes to pass. We are deterred not by money, she said, but by fear of change. This may not be a perfect proposal, but God does not ask us to be perfect. Let us take a deep breath and rest in God’s arms. God offers us not fear, but faith, and asks us to do only what we know best to do. Let us not make our decision out of fear of what will happen if we don’t, but rather from love of what will happen if we do.

“I rise to testify to my grief at this moment,” a Friend told us – grief for our young friends, for the rift we are forming if we do not yield to Spirit, for our stubborn resistance and for our desire to push through, and for the way we wound ourselves. We will leave this gathering tomorrow at midday. “Where will we be at our next yearly meeting if this is where we end our week together?”, he asked.

Through ministry in song as well as the spoken word, we were called again to listen and to hear.

We are faced with a political reality, a Friend said. Without the support of the largest monthly meeting in this Yearly Meeting, this proposal would be likely to fail. A Friend who told us that her life history attests to success at what had seemed impossible called us to act boldly, with faith.

Passionate statements from the silence continued to reveal both shared commitments to nurturance of our youth and divergent convictions about the wisdom and the potential of the proposal before us. Sobs mingled with the rustle of leaves and the slapping of our tent walls in the afternoon breeze. Anguished and divided, with no clear path before us, it seemed that our hearts would break.

A Friend from our largest monthly meeting, Palo Alto, assured us that despite the concerns he had conveyed from that Meeting about the cost of this proposal he was certain that generous Friends would come forward to contribute. If this proposal was approved, he was confident that Palo Alto Friends would do their utmost to make it a success. He went on to urge that we not merely double the assessment but triple it, and allocate the additional funds to AFSC and FCNL.

Sensing movement on the matter before us, the Clerk asked that we return to silence. He reminded us that this is *worship*. It need not be serious or solemn, but it must be respectful. When people speak, we should listen.

“We are uncomfortable with this process,” a Friend told us from the silence, “and thank God for this discomfort.” She reminded us of the query, “What would we do if we were not afraid?” This is a challenge of faith, and not of logistics.

Some of the concerns we have heard in this session were acknowledged as valid and then addressed by a Friend who believed that they can be managed. Most program proposals are revised in light of experience after they are approved, he told us. Given anxieties that have been voiced about doubling our assessment, this Friend suggested that we approve the proposal without changing our assessment, asking Friends to give what they can to meet the added cost. This would remove the element of fear and perceived compulsion. There are yearly meetings without assessments. They make their members aware of what is needed, and they receive what they need from voluntary contributions. Perhaps one day we, too, will have no assessment.

Several Friends voiced their faith that we can, indeed, move forward as a community, affirmed their sense of the importance of this initiative, and spoke of their willingness to proceed despite their own concerns about some aspects of the proposal, confident that the wisdom and experience of Friends who have objected can be drawn upon to strengthen our plans and our work. “Example is the best teacher,” we heard. Coming to unity is not easy or fast, and sometimes it hurts. Even when the cause is not popular we need to voice our concerns and take the time we need to truly come to unity. We need to be spiritually generous to our youth, and to ourselves.

Our Clerk told us that he had heard Friends who had not expressed their unity before unite with the suggestion that we approve the proposal without an assessment, and our Finance Committee Clerk had assured us that we can fund the proposal for one year. He asked if we were now able to unite. A Friend who had felt unheard and shoved aside in this process told us that she could nevertheless unite with the proposal if the position were called “Youth Program Coordinator,” rather than “Youth Coordinator.”

**PYM 2009-n** Pacific Yearly Meeting approved moving forward with the revised Youth Program Coordinator Position Proposal for a three-year trial period, asking that yearly written reports be presented to our annual sessions and that an assessment of the project be made at the end of the three years. Further, we ask the committee to consider the needs of our youth from age 10 through Young Friends, addressing the needs of our monthly and quarterly meetings. We also ask the Coordinator and the committee to help us address the issues of safety raised by our monthly meetings, parents, and youth. Instead of raising the Pacific Yearly Meeting assessment, we ask each monthly meeting to consider making a contribution of at least \$38.00 per member to cover the costs of the proposal. We are aware that the proposal we have approved is open to change and modification as we go forward.

Two Friends informed us that they could not unite with this minute. Another told us that she does not understand or approve the decision to fund this proposal in the first year from reserves and

contributions. We should honestly inform our monthly meetings of the costs of what we have approved and pay in our usual way for what God has asked us to do.

In response to a question, the Clerk told us that by “three-year experiment” we mean that the program will be assessed annually, and that after three years if we do not approve continuing the program it will be laid down.

The meeting closed at 5:25 p.m. with worship.

Faithfully submitted,

Jamie Newton, Recording Clerk

Joe Franko, Presiding Clerk

**[NOTE:** The minutes of Plenary VIII were read and approved in Plenary IX.]