

Framing Statement

Jim Anderson, clerk of the Futures Subcommittee of M&O, attended our May meeting and brought us a report outlining the history of the 3 years of the committee's work and recommending some possible ways forward. We also heard PYM Clerk Marilee Eusebio's report of Representative Committee in March. We'd like to commend the Futures subcommittee for their work and share some highlights of M&O's discussion with you. (The full Futures Report and RepCom minutes are available in reading room).

M&O discussed one of the first issues taken up by the Future's subcommittee, "We don't seem to have a clear shared understanding of the purpose of Yearly Meeting and our Annual Gathering."

We began by making a distinction between the terms PYM (or Yearly Meeting) and Annual Gathering (AG). PYM refers to the entire Yearly Meeting, including the two Quarterly Meetings, and all of the Monthly Meetings and individuals that make up the Yearly Meeting as a whole. It also includes the RepCom. The Annual Gathering refers to the yearly gathering in which we come together for decision making, spiritual renewal, and fellowship.

We voiced our perception of Annual Gathering as a chance to see what the whole of yearly meeting is, beyond our Monthly Meetings, to experience the beloved community, to understand and nurture the spirit of that whole. We are reminded that we are a whole, a Society of Friends, rather than a loosely connected collection of Meetings pursuing disparate practices in a disjointed manner. Our Faith and Practice, our attention to good order, and our seeking the will of the Spirit in corporate worship bind us together.

At our Annual Gathering we can be stretched anew - we can find the clarity and light to be powerful in speaking truth to each other and in speaking truth to the world. As one member put it, "we believe there is that of God in everyone. If we take this seriously and pay attention it can be powerful. It is easier to pay attention, to see that of God in everyone, when we are in community. If the whole community pays attention, it can be really powerful in the world."

Our Annual Gatherings provide a much needed place for children, teens, young Friends, and Friends from smaller meetings to come together in community. The Annual Gathering can be a space where we acknowledge, listen to, are inspired by, and support those whose radical, committed lives are visible among us. We (M&O) hear a yearning to be Spirit led and to nurture one another's lives in the Spirit. We look to PYM to help us to change our lives to better live our testimonies. When this happens, the ripples affect not just those who attend the Annual Gathering, but also all the individuals and Meetings in our region. If the main purpose of the Annual Gathering could shift to one of spiritual development and nurture, then the gathering would have sessions, workshops, themes, and speakers that relate to that purpose.

What about our plenary sessions in which we worship together on the occasion of business? It was the sense of Futures Committee, and our experience as well, that our business process faces difficulties. In the best of plenaries we are in worship, trying to discern how the Spirit is guiding us as a whole. However, some of us perceive a creeping sense of mistrust at our Annual Gatherings and sense that attention to good order is not always as it could be. We began to wonder whether those who attend the Annual Gathering, that is those who have the time and money to do so, are really representative of all the Quakers in Pacific Yearly Meeting. Is this the group who should be making the decisions?

The Ministry and Oversight Committee is hopeful that our Annual Gatherings will move towards dedicating more time to community and spiritual development, and less time to business. In order to do that, we will need to understand what business needs to involve everyone and come to plenary, and what can be given to the Representative Committee or be delegated to standing committees.

We propose to continue the work that Futures Committee has begun to strengthen the role of the representatives so that there is a real connection between Monthly Meetings and the Yearly Meeting via the Representative Committee. Just a reminder: Representative Committee is open to anyone who wishes to attend, and currently meets once during the year, in March.

We know that you will have questions and comments, and I want to assure you that we will have some time for those before we close. However, we'd like to flesh out some specifics for you, and at this time I'd like to pass the mic to Brian Vura Weiss.