

**Pacific Yearly Meeting
68th Annual Session Minutes and Reports**

Listening Session on “Minutes of Concern,” Thursday July 17, 2014 *(Notes, not minutes)*

[Clerk’s note: In recent PYM Annual Sessions we have often found it difficult to discern unity on minutes that declare our position on major issues. The Listening Session and Threshing Session recorded below invite Friends to seek greater clarity. The Listening Session began with brief statements from a panel of three Friends who represented divergent views.]

The note taker missed Anthony M.’s presentation. The “Procedures for Presenting a Minute of Concern to Pacific Yearly Meeting Annual Session” document is the creation of the PYM Peace & Social Order Committee, not the Yearly Meeting (although the Clerk and Ministry & Oversight Committee have weighed in on it).

Jim Anderson (Chico): How do we engage in faithful living as a community and make our lives speak? How can we use our plenaries to nurture the Spirit? His concern was not on the process of seasoning a minute, but how those gathered for a Session have can have sufficient familiarity with a minute to speak authentically regarding it. (He noted that the term “minute of concern” is not mentioned in our *Faith & Practice* – just “action minutes” and “minutes of exercise.”) We are at our best when a minute reflects a shared sense of rightness, risk, and power. A minute should embody not simply a call to act but how we actually live. Lobbying and position taking are fine for some Quaker bodies, but minutes of concern in which we speak to ourselves (for example, some Unity with Nature minutes) or to the world often seem out of rhythm with how we actually live as Friends. It would be fine to have the Clerk send a letter on our behalf or delegate a representative from the Session to meet with authorities. He appreciated the current Clerk’s scheduling with more time for worship.

Laura Magnani (Strawberry Creek) presented these questions for consideration:

- (1) What does it mean to be a corporate body?
- (2) How does a corporate body of Friends act?
- (3) Is passing a minute as a minute in and of itself an action?
- (4) Is directing a minute to a President/Governor/Legislature really petitioning government in our times?

She shared a reflection based on a recent personal experience in which she was “the Friend” selected for a faith delegation by the coalition. Others on the delegation had been appointed by their faith judicatories. She would like us to have a mechanism like a judicatory by which she could be officially named as “a Friends’ representative.”

Comments from the floor:

A Friend appreciated that the P&SO Committee process may lessen the past pains suffered by the P&SO Order Committee in faithfully carrying out their service to the Yearly Meeting.

Another Friend noted that we do have legitimate Quaker voices in FCL-CA and FCNL. Why can’t we better utilize these institutions when, for instance with Citizens United response, FCNL had done an admirable job on which we could take action? Are we using our existing resources to the fullest extent possible?

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A Friend stated that those gathered at the Annual Session constitute a corporate body in its own right, and that body cannot claim to represent all monthly meetings/worship groups within PYM.

A Friend wondered if we are heading into reliance on a seemingly random process versus relying on Spirit rising out of the gathered body?

Plenary VIII, Friday July 18, 2014: Threshing Session: “Minutes of Concern”:

How may we as a corporate body come to unity to share our voice and leadings with our wider community? How can we with integrity approve minutes of concern?

A Friend spoke as a first time attender but did read the proposal from Peace & Social Order Committee. It had two parts: first a minute would be put forward by at least two Quaker entities and then undergo discernment by the P&SO Committee. The first part of the proposal seemed to imply a lack of confidence in the PYM nominating process that created P&SO and in the P&SO ability to engage in discernment.

Clerk: That set of procedures was established by P&SO for itself and has not been approved by PYM. The purpose of the first section was to be clear that no one can speak for all 1400 members of PYM; an approved minute could represent only those gathered at the Session where the minute was adopted.

The issue before us is an opportunity to strengthen our prophetic witness. Past minutes (for example, on drone warfare, torture) are so large that most Friends have personal contact with them, so feel disconnected from them. The speaker asked that we unite with minutes that identify actions that we can individually do and thus let our lives speak. Topics brought by P&SO Committee are worthy, but they could be more specific. Too often, minutes of concern sound like statements of position, but seem so disconnected to one’s life that one does not act.

A Friend stated that he wants this body to render public judgments—to be at times a judicatory body (as suggested by Laura Magnani in yesterday’s Listening Session), to be represented among the voices of concern on some the world’s problems, but it be done with integrity, not with a hand-waving moment.

We Friends expect people to speak plainly and simply with an uncommon degree of integrity. At the same time we need to be more trusting that people are saying yes as yeses, and nays as nays. Maybe we ought to hear voices from the floor of plenary as authentic and accept them more readily.

Another Friend called attention to an historical context: prior to the Civil War, elders and other weighty Friends made decisions on right order and correct behaviors. After the Civil War, in which many Friends supported the Union cause and even served as soldiers in the Union Army, Friends moved away from the earlier “top-down” structure and relied increasingly on individual conscience, moving to a more congregational structure. Minutes of concern now reflect not so much what Friends actually do, but what we think Friends should do.

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A Friend said there are many ways to talk about how a Yearly Meeting speaks. Do we “reach unity,” or are we covered by the Holy Spirit and become a mouthpiece for the Spirit? George Fox wrote that there is only one Holy Spirit and if we are in unity, we will discover that we are in unity through the Holy Spirit, and that is a pretty demanding doctrine. Our job is not to tell the world what Quakers think but to be available to the Holy Spirit and thereby find ourselves in unity.

Another Friend’s concern was “seasoning” and whether or not past minutes truly were seasoned. The recent militarized drones and anti-torture minutes questions raised at the last Session might have been more fully seasoned at the Monthly Meeting or Quarterly level.

A Friend was exercised that there are many questions being dealt with at the national level and that we Quakers are not set up to speak at that level. We are required to take specific actions that we don’t bring up at the Session. Our nation is at a crossroads and major issues such as Citizens United decision, intolerable income disparities, recent disenfranchisement moves, and mass incarceration seem to be missing our Quaker voices/experiences. In the past Quakers have led with statements that moved our country forward on national concerns. We do have structures (e.g. FCNL and FCL-CA) that enable our voices to be heard. We should properly season our views and reach a unity from the widest number of Friends.

Another Friend said that when a proposed minute is brought forward, we might send out the minute via a listserv of P&SO Committee clerks or even to all Representatives, to hear the minute well ahead of time. In the past that “up and down seasoning” has not usually occurred.

A Friend said that she liked the P&SO Committee process as presented. (In particular in the second paragraph, in bold print the outline of what is required to present a minute is helpful.) Good structure leads to good outcomes.

This year’s clerk of P&SO took the caution of better seasoning of minutes to heart. He felt that minutes should speak to what we should do: we don’t operate militarized drones or carry out torture, so how are we in our living called to do something? Minutes on eco-spirituality are more about what we should do in our lives, but he favors calls to action. Better seasoning will help but the emphasis on action will also help.

Another Friend said that he appreciated the words spoken this week, but one weakness he saw last year was that we worked very hard but without shared expectations. It now looks like we are moving towards shared expectations. One statement in the P&SO Committee process feels like a false step: we should question the assumption that a statement by 300 Quakers (i.e. PYM Annual Session) is worth more than a statement by 30 Quakers (e.g. a delegation to a legislator by a coalition of Quakers or by a Meeting). He told of sending out a letter to a legislator and hearing back from the legislator’s staff member that they had grown up in Pacifica and never knew that 300 Quakers lived there.