

Dear Friends,

There will be two special items of discernment at the 2018 Annual Session in addition to the approval of an Annual Budget, Nominating slate, Website policy, acceptance of the Epistle, and several other items.

1. FGC Affiliation – information on this topic has been distributed over the last year and further up-to-date documents will be available on the PYM website soon.

2. Witnessing to a Troubled World. Over the three years as Presiding Clerk I've become aware of different visions held by members of our Yearly Meeting as to what the Yearly Meeting Annual Session can do to support our witness in the world. At this summer's Annual Session these different visions will be shared with the hope of furthering our discernment on what we can do. This discernment will begin in a "Listening Session" that will take place in the Sunday morning plenary. We will have the opportunity to discern our future direction by listening to the spirit as it informs us without feeling the pressure of having to make a decision. It will be wonderful if we come to unity on a way forward but it is not expected. The following documents give different perspectives of how PYM can witness to a troubled world:

- The current Peace and Social Order Committee (P&SO) has a vision of networking with the Monthly Meetings to strengthen their work and to share the leadings of the spirit across Monthly Meetings. This vision includes renewal and support that is articulated in the document titled, "Visioning - Peace and Social Order – June 2018".
- A former P&SO committee proposed in 2014 a procedure for bringing what they called 'Minutes of Concern' to the Annual Session. Please read the document titled, "Procedures for Presenting a Minute of Concern at Pacific Yearly Meeting Annual Session".
- Ministry & Oversight wrote a document that called attention to some of the shortcomings of this Minutes of Concern process which they have been discussing with the P&SO Committee and other action-oriented committees for the last few years. M&O has begun implementing a structure of spiritual support to help deepen the Annual Session gathering. Please read an excerpt from their full document titled, "An excerpt regarding Minutes of Concern from M&O".
- Other Friends have articulated leadings as a way to revitalize our meetings and to understand our social witness. Please read the document titled, "Rekindling the Fire".

There are other visions too that will be shared during the Listening Session. Please come prepared by reading these documents.

I'm looking forward to seeing you all at Annual Session.

With warmest regards,

Diego Navarro
Presiding Clerk, Pacific Yearly Meeting

Visioning - Peace and Social Order – June 2018

Social Justice activism has always required multiple sensitivities. It draws on citizenship, leadership, social analysis, spiritual formation, articulation of narratives imagining a different future than the one being offered by dominant society, advocacy, education, self-care, and community as well as coalition building, not necessarily in this order. Nor is this list exhaustive.

People first engage activism through various entry points. Some may already be steeped in Friend's spiritual formation through queries, but not social analysis. Others may be natural leaders, but less well versed in self care. Some may be more relational building oriented, some more task driven. Yet, if our goal is sustained social justice activism, then all aspects including self care, education, and long term goals are integral in our Spirit led activism. How can we be most practical, maintain balance, assist financial aspects of social justice work, while witnessing and stewarding transformation? I think the answer lies in being faithful. What then does that mean?

Offering balanced ways of proceeding may differ for various Monthly Meetings especially if all are focused on being faithful. PSO in networking with Monthly Meetings, is finding that certain meetings are struggling with self care, aging, and diminished capacity. Others are experiencing the same while adapting to their circumstances and finding ways to contribute in new ways - usually less physically active often providing more financial support to organizations doing grass roots work and civic engagement. Possibly being faithful in these circumstances may mean looking to how they can contribute to a legacy of social justice work while attending to their end of life needs. In addition, I wonder how can we, PYM, celebrate their lifelong social justice contributions before honoring them in memorials? By choosing to honor and celebrate the past work members have achieved while still living, we also contribute to a viable learning community.

Other Monthly Meetings are thriving and growing and the challenge is bridging the next generation with an emphasis on social media skills and possibly different ways of organizing. How do we honor the wisdom of our elders and the wisdom of our younger members who've had access to different skill sets? What does being faithful entail in these situations?

Social justice also requires facing the despair of the world, externally and internally. How do we honor and witness the grief in our world as well as our own? Can we see this as a form of spiritual formation? Can we recognize the need to ground ever more deeply in our faith, exposing our radical vulnerability? An outgrowth of facing our grief can be social justice action. The topics of Minutes of Concern throughout PYM, reveal there is an underlying theme common to all: Economic injustice. Economic non-opportunity has been shown to play a part in the opioid crisis, as well as in immigration issues. Economic non-opportunity is also an underlying issue with systemic racism and mass incarceration and ties into who our nation criminalizes whether it be the poor, homeless, addicted, or immigrants. How is our faithfulness providing hope?

How might Monthly Meetings, PYM and PSO better integrate the skills and resources offered by AFSC, FCNL, and FCLCA in a more cohesive fashion? Are the interest groups the best avenue? Are Minutes of Concern the best avenue? All Friend's organizations, AFSC, FCNL and FCLCA, PYM, and Monthly Meetings, are a web of people working for justice and dignity in our world. If we want to

Visioning - Peace and Social Order – June 2018

integrate the resources for addressing social injustices in our communities, how might living faithfully lead us to share these resources beyond our own Friends' circles?

Peace and social concerns have always required continual reflection, whether before taking action, through the cycle of analysis - as things may not be as they seem, as we witness, as we grow and change ourselves, as we address complexity, hold tension, or as we evaluate our actions. When new challenges arise we may be required to renegotiate and re-prioritize our commitments, as well as reevaluate our structures and processes in order to adapt.

May we continue to steward transformation of our nation's choices and policies to reflect the dignity of our most oppressed. May we address the root causes of systemic injustice. May we face reality, without giving power to fear, hate or overwhelm and be faithful, against issues that we might never see resolved in our lifetime, knowing we have lived faithfully through our social justice work, practice, and reflection.

Yours in faith, Shannon Frediani (clerk of Peace and Social Order)

Proposed Procedures for Presenting a Minute of Concern at Pacific Yearly Meeting Annual Session - Peace and Social Order Committee, July 2014

Purposes of minutes of concern:

1. To draw upon the collective wisdom and spiritual power of Friends present at the Pacific Yearly Meeting (PYM) Annual Session in order to insure that the minute is accurate, faithful to our Quaker testimonies and truly reflects a leading of the Spirit among Friends as we understand it.
2. To lend the authority of the PYM Annual Session to concerns brought by a local or quarterly meeting, an individual with a leading, or a Quaker organization, thus increasing the effectiveness of those under the weight of this concern. Others, including elected officials, pay more attention when a statement comes from a large representative body rather than from a local one or an individual.
3. To insure that the minute circulates as widely as possible.

Wording of a minute of concern:

A minute of concern is a simple and clear expression of our faith. It consists of a short background statement regarding the concern followed by a brief minute that takes a position and recommends an action. The background statement and minute will be considered separately. The background statement may be used when the clerk is authorized to send a letter to elected officials, organizations and "Friends everywhere."

Seasoning Minutes of Concern Prior to the Annual Session;

1. Friends gathered at the Annual Session have authority to speak on behalf of themselves, but do not speak for all constituent members of Pacific Yearly Meeting. Thus minutes of concern approved at the Annual Session are spirit led statements by those gathered at the Annual Session, and are not binding on constituent monthly meetings, their members and attenders. This understanding is analogous to the practices of Friends Committee on National Legislation, which gathers input from a broad spectrum of Friends but does not claim to speak on behalf of all Friends. Although the Annual Session has representatives from constituent Meetings in Pacific Yearly Meeting, Friends at the Annual Session seek to be led by the promptings of the Spirit present amongst them at the time they gather, and not by their notions of what their local Meetings might want. Thus minutes approved by those at the Annual Session should begin with an explicit qualification: *'Friends gathered at the ___th Annual Session of Pacific Yearly Meeting, held in ___(LOCATION)___ on ___(DATE)_, after careful discernment, approved the following minute. Etc.'*
2. Minutes of concern presented to PYM Annual Session by Peace and Social Order Committee (PSO) reflect spirit led matters that Meetings, individual Friends, and Quaker organizations have considered and acted upon. In all cases,

PSO must come to unity about presenting such a request before it is brought to the Annual Session for consideration. Before they are sent to PYM PSO,

- a. Minutes of concern arising in Southern California must be approved by a monthly meeting and by a quarterly gathering of Southern California Quarterly Meeting.
 - b. Since College Park Quarterly does not consider minutes of concern, at least two monthly meetings in College Park Quarterly Meeting must approve minutes addressing the same concern before the concern is brought to PYM PSO.
 - c. Meetings not belonging to a quarterly meeting that are under the care of Pacific Yearly Meeting (such as monthly meetings and worship groups in Hawai'i) may, upon approving a minute of concern, present the minute directly to PYM PSO for consideration.
 - d. A concern may also be sent directly to PYM PSO by representatives of organizations such as Friends Committee on National Legislation and American Friends Service Committee.
3. If a pressing emergency (such as the imminent threat of a war) occurs just prior to Yearly Meeting's Annual Session and Friends are led to respond, Friends gathered at the PYM Annual Session may speak out as Spirit leads them. In such cases, the procedure is for Friends to bring this concern to PSO, Ministry and Oversight Committee (M&O), and the Presiding Clerk for their consideration. If PSO, M&O and the Presiding Clerk are in unity about doing so, PYM PSO will present a minute of concern to the Annual Session for possible approval.

**An excerpt regarding Minutes of Concern from a M&O document on the Topic
May 2017**

PYM Minutes of Concern are minutes brought forward by committees and discerned and sometimes approved by the Yearly Meeting. We are concerned that these minutes do not result in action on the part of our Monthly Meetings nor cause our personal lives to change. Minutes of Concern seem to end after the Yearly Meeting approves them and there is no ongoing relationship of accountability with the Yearly Meeting nor engagement with the Monthly or Quarterly Meetings. We believe that Minutes of Concern should be the beginning of a process that engages the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings thus extending the scope and effectiveness of a concern and leading to changes in our lives.

Rekindling the Fire

By Betty Devalcourt & Diego Navarro

Looking towards the future of Quakerism, we see that the power to rekindle our fire for social justice lies within our local meetings. Supporting individuals to pursue the spirit's leadings to work for peace and social justice will strengthen the Religious Society of Friends overall and connect us back to our historical roots.

In Santa Cruz Meeting, we have discovered one helpful approach for reclaiming our witness for peace and justice in the 21st Century. We have developed an intentional set of structures and processes for supporting individual leadings, which can then inspire action by the whole meeting.

For several years, our meeting had been concerned that our Peace and Social Order Committee had become inactive, with fewer and fewer members. It seemed to lack the life, aliveness and fire that it needed to do its work, and that was present in our Meeting's history. But rather than lay the committee down, we laid it aside and waited for inner promptings of the Spirit.

For a while, we experimented with an approach in which our co-clerks brought new peace and social justice concerns to our whole meeting. But we did not feel confident that we had found a fresh approach to discernment. And we found that intentional follow-up on concerns was difficult to achieve.

Finally, last year, our meeting approved a new process based on the idea that Quaker social action traditionally has been initiated through the personal concerns of individuals that grow into personal leadings. Eventually, they may grow into leadings that move a whole meeting.

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Douglas Steere describes the unfolding of a personal concern as an idiosyncratic and experimental process. When a person feels the stirring of a concern, occasionally "the concern has put its finger on a specific thing to be done and on the initial steps of carrying it out...More often the concern has laid hold of the person in terms of a deep inner distress over the wrongness of some

situation or a yearning to minister to some condition of need without more than the first minute step being clear to him as to how to deal with it... If the first step that is laid upon him is not undertaken, the later ones are not disclosed."

Our experience is that meetings as corporate bodies tend to overlook individual leadings when they emerge, or they are reluctant to support leadings that they do notice, whether those leadings have emerged tentatively or stridently. If a meeting understood that an individual's leading might be intended by the Spirit to move the whole meeting, then the meeting might hold that individual more closely and supportively as they explore the meaning of their concern. William Taber stated, "A reading of Quaker journals from George Fox onward makes it clear that this inward work takes time and may cause us to make painful changes in our lives as we become more and more sensitive and obedient to the inward guide. Although this inward work continues as long as we live and remain open to new learning, there is a sense in which seekers do become finders through the inward work of the Spirit."

Our meeting began developing a support system for personal leadings by setting three goals:

- 1) Keep *energy* flowing in the corporate body of the meeting around social witness concerns while raising the meeting's awareness of Spirit moving within it.
- 2) Instill *intentionality* to the meeting's process of watching for promptings of the Spirit as they emerge in concerns and in using Quaker process to ensure that signs of the Spirit are not overlooked.
- 3) Bring corporate *accountability* to ongoing concerns to prevent them from gathering dust in the attics of our minds and ensure good order in the process.

Our meeting then proposed and approved a "Leadings and Social Witness Mentor" role to identify leadings in the meeting and nurturing them to fruition if appropriate. The mentor serves as a mid-wife to concerns and leadings in individuals, helps with spiritual and logistical support for the individuals, helps keep concerns and leadings in the meeting's awareness, and provides accountability and visibility for leadings. Important parts of this Mentor role include being alert to signs of a leading, offering guidance to those who might be sensing leadings, and arranging

for clearness committees when appropriate. Of course, others in the meeting are encouraged to watch for leadings and let the mentor know when they see signs of them.

Some concerns are simple and might involve simple responses, for example: petition signing or letter writing with no further action. The person bearing the concern might then feel released from it after taking action. If a person still feels weighed down by a concern after simple actions have been taken, then the Leadings and Social Witness Mentor may arrange a clearness committee for

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the individual, with the explicit understanding that the committee will meet three times only. This limit ensures that we conserve meeting energy for other leadings that might need attention.

Seeking Clearness: An important first step in our clearness process is for the person seeking clearness to write a few succinct paragraphs that express the nature of their concern, ways they have labored with it, and some of the insights they have already gained in the process. This statement is shared with all members of the clearness committee well in advance of its first meeting, so that all have a chance to consider the matter carefully.

Selecting and Educating Members of a Clearness Committee: The composition of a clearness committee should balance skills and strengths, such as good time management and boundaries, experience with Quaker clearness process, specific skills or experiences related to the leading being considered, and wisdom in discernment. Serving on a clearness committee can be a beneficial spiritual experience for meeting members and attenders, whether they are new to Quakerism or seasoned Friends. To prepare for service on a clearness committee, its members are encouraged to read the booklet *Faithfulness in Action* by Pacific Yearly Meeting, which explains the manner and importance of Quaker process in discerning and supporting leadings.

Bringing the Concern Forward: Once the clearness committee has completed its process (within three meetings), it may

recommend that the leading has been seasoned enough and needs to be brought to the Business Meeting for assistance or further action. The committee usually does this by producing a report and recommendation for the Oversight Committee. The committee might also feel that the wider meeting community needs to learn more about the concern. In this case, the Leadings and Social Mentor might join the clearness committee in offering logistical support for outreach activities, such as finding someone to set up an LCD projector for a presentation or distributing literature about the concern.

One of the inspirational seeds of this proposal in Santa Cruz Meeting was the emergence of leadings in several meeting attenders and members over a short period of time. They each took spontaneous action on a social concern without clear, intentional, ongoing meeting support: A new member decided to experiment with music and dinners in a Quaker worship context at a homeless shelter. An active attender announced after worship that she had started a petition to end the death penalty. Another member created an illustrated pamphlet about vast military spending in relation to sparse education spending. And yet another member became an active and insightful advocate for the rights of the homeless. All are “classic” Quaker concerns. Each of these Friends seemed to have taken the lonely step of jumping right in to work as an individual.

Still, each of these Friends also shared their thoughts with the meeting in some way, like by sending messages to the meeting’s email list or by making announcements after Meeting for Worship. These Friends did not see their actions as leadings. They merely wanted the Meeting to know about their concerns. Our meeting’s new process for supporting personal leadings can help us avoid missed opportunities. It can help remind us to follow up on individual concerns, so that we don’t miss the important moment of the birth of a leading.

The principles of leadings and of being led are central parts of our Quaker heritage, but they are not fully understood or realized in modern Quaker life. According to Hugh Barbour and Arthur O. Roberts in their book *Early Quaker Writings*, three conditions helped early Friends learn to follow their Inner Guide:

“First was their language of Truth, ... a process of ‘truing up’ one’s awareness ... Truth was acted, not just understood or believed... Friends preached that every person had within his mind and conscience an ability to

recognize Truth, which was one of the meanings they gave to the Seed of the 'new man' which could grow within...

"Second, Friends were gathered in small Meetings, where members who had been through the period of inner struggle could reassure others that it was not final. Shared experience made the concurrence of leadings of conscience important, making the 'Sense of the Meeting' central in shared decisions...

"Third, the power of the early Quaker movement was its combination of dramatic inner changes in life ... with its character as the religious awakening of a region ... [and] we must add the overwhelming power of the love and appreciation which Friends felt for each other... as they shared awareness of victory over evil in themselves and the world..."

By seeking to foster these three conditions today, we can perhaps deepen the Spirit in our lives and meetings. This process can deeply affect worship and the Spirit's working within our meetings, tapping into our Quaker legacy. Clearness committees, in our recent experience, also have the effect of creating small "home groups" within meetings, where values are shared and friendships are deepened.

Thomas Kelly states in his *Testament of Devotion* that "Our meetings were meant to be such groups, but now too many of them are dulled and cooled and flooded by the secular. But within our meetings such inner bands of men and women, internally set apart, living by a vow of perpetual obedience to the Inner Voice, in the world yet not of the world, ready to go the second half, obedient as a shadow—such bands of humble prophets can recreate the Society of Friends."

It seems crucial that meetings become more intentional about attending to the Spirit moving among us and holding close to Friends who are being led. Doing so might allow us to better understand and study what leadings really are and perhaps to follow future leadings ourselves. In our Meeting we held a series of mini-meetings for learning about leadings and provided background from PYM's *Faithfulness in Action* and early Quaker writings. Leadings emerge in all of us, not just the activists among us. Ultimately, we all hold the tension between the corporate spiritual body and the individual through our awareness of Spirit moving in meeting as a whole and within an individual's calling. As Friends, we carry the spiritual

tools we need for discerning where Spirit is moving us as a corporate body, including the recognition of instances when we are not in unity on a concern.

Ian Thiermann, a longtime, beloved activist in Santa Cruz Meeting, often closes his ministry by remembering a profound sign that he once saw hung over a worship room door: "Enter to Worship, Depart to Serve."

Indeed. And how might we be led to do so? ❖

Betty Devalcourt is a member of Santa Cruz Friends Meeting, where she has been active for 30 years and where she nurtures social witness leadings in others. She has followed her own leadings to engage in civil disobedience on war and nuclear power issues, to facilitate AVP workshops, to participate in a Nigerian education project, and to work with her local community on homelessness and peace issues.

Diego Navarro is a member of Santa Cruz Friends Meeting and a former Clerk of Pacific Yearly Meeting's Ministry and Oversight Committee. He has developed and conducted a three-session workshop on leadings, drawing in part from his personal experience with following a leading to create a nationally recognized program to help underprepared college students succeed in meeting their goals.

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