

Ministry & Oversight Name Change Reflections

June 2018

Introduction

Our committee brought a request for a name change to Annual Session 2017. We specifically wanted to remove the word 'oversight' and to replace it with 'care' which, we felt, reflected well what we do for the Yearly Meeting. Following some discernment on the plenary floor, the Yearly Meeting was found not to be in unity. During Open Committee time, and at other times, we listened to various reactions and responses regarding our proposed name change. A lot of the responses were in support to change the name, including from Friends of color. We also received suggestions for some alternatives, most of which we had previously considered. We heard a few concerns about removing 'oversight' from our name. Interestingly, the concerns about dropping the word 'oversight' related to a perception that perhaps we would lose some discipline and accountability in the Yearly Meeting - something we have not necessarily focussed on and have felt many Friends have actively resisted.

In early 2018 we came back to consider the question of the name of our committee.

The consideration started with an exercise to explore what we are as a committee today. What is it that we really do? Not just what our job description but who we are and what do we spend time on. Following that was a period of deep facilitated worship sharing.

Our Findings

We are now a different group than when we first considered this question but at the end of our deliberations, the same, quiet sense of unity that we had experienced the year before persisted - we still feel the need for a new name. For some the reason of the connection of the word 'oversight' to slavery, and the result that we are called 'overseers' is the strongest reason. For others, the lack of congruence between what we do and the name we have is just as important. Given that our suggestion was not accepted by the Yearly Meeting, what our new name could be we do not know. Perhaps Friends needed more time to sit with the proposed change, perhaps it is not a good fit.

We found that we struggled with the word 'ministry' as well as 'oversight'. 'Ministry' can refer to everything, and consequently, nothing! Although 'ministry' could be used to refer accurately to everything we do, we found that something was missing if we were to be called the "Ministry Committee". We believe that all of what everyone in the Yearly Meeting is doing is various types of ministry. We felt that something was needed to go with it, or to find a different name.

One thing we were clear on was that at the heart of the things we do is listening.

We found that core areas of work that we do are:

- Large amount of tasks and logistics for the Annual Session (care of worship, worship sharing, Meeting for Memorials, Community Expectations, Quiet Room, Attendance)

Assistance, State of the Society Report, Community (Family) Night, facilitating spiritual accompaniment, support the Presiding Clerk, coordinating with First Nations representatives, create the Epistle Committee, organising microphones, door keepers, addressing conflict, providing pastoral care, and more)

- Pastoral care of various sorts, including at Annual Session
- Supporting Monthly and Quarterly Meetings particularly when there is conflict
- Addressing conflict in various forms throughout the Yearly Meeting
- Supporting Yearly Meeting committees
- Connecting and coordinating among various parts of the Yearly Meeting
- Keeping our fingers on the pulse of the Yearly Meeting
- Holding a 'big picture' for the Yearly Meeting (not exclusive to our committee, others also do this in their own ways)
- Supporting the Presiding Clerk
- Praying for, and loving, the Yearly Meeting
- Caring for the Monthly Meetings directly under our care

Some of the words we found to describe us included:

- Community builders (which is how 'oversight' is understood in some places)
- Nurturers
- Midwives
- Clan mothers

Things we long to do more of, and more deeply are:

- Supporting spiritual growth, assisting the Yearly Meeting to 'live on the leading edge of Spirit'
- Lovingly holding the Yearly Meeting to account (providing accountability)
- Putting down a deep spiritual tap root from which the Yearly Meeting can better grow
- Supporting education needs identification and fulfillment, including about who we are as Quakers, how to do spiritual development etc
- Providing guidance, facilitating where requested
- Caring for the Quarterly Meetings

We found that there was work we deeply believe is the work of this committee but we do not have the capacity for it. It seems like we have two or three committees worth of work.

We present this report to the Yearly Meeting with no request at this time. We encourage Friends to pray with what we've written and the committee will continue to sit with this question into the future. We are clear and aware that it is our job to serve, and be named by, the Yearly Meeting and trust in Spirit to lead us all.