

Old Chatham Monthly Meeting Comments on New York Yearly Meeting's Statement of Leadings and Priorities, May 2014

draft of 13 July 2014 for consideration by OCMM Monthly Meeting for Business

Old Chatham Friends met on two occasions to consider the **Statement of Leadings and Priorities** put forth by the NYYM Priorities Working Group.

The PWG report and statement was disseminated electronically to OCMM friends immediately following Spring Sessions and again in May with the newly added section on accountability. An abridged version was also distributed in preparation for the gatherings to discuss the Statement. Still many friends had not read the Statement prior to our gatherings.

In light of this we asked those gathered three questions:

- Why Quakers? Why engage in this endeavor together?
- What can we do better as many Meetings than as an individual Meeting?
- How do the priorities in the PWG report fit with our answers to the second question?

For the first question, what came out of our discussion was that the Quaker community provides support for spiritual journeys, meshes well with what people experience as true and right in their lives, is open to many paths and to opportunities to become something new but still growing on a traditional structure, is experience-based (it includes both an individual and a corporate mystical experience), and holds promise as a way of moving the world forward in positive ways.

Building from the desire to “let our lives speak” that was rising up among us, we saw the Yearly Meeting as providing support and structures for conversations among Meetings and creating cohorts – groups of people drawn together by experience, leadings, and spiritual needs to help us live our faith. Visibility in the wider world is important. Action arising from our experience of our faith and anchored in our testimonies is important. Business Meetings that encourage us to speak from where we are moved (leadings) and test that movement are important. Sharing of information and resources is important. Expectations for participants engaged at Yearly Meeting functions to bring that work back to their Monthly Meetings are important.

In short:

We want a yearly meeting that helps create a religious society that lifts up, enables, and facilitates individuals and groups to take action to live our faith boldly.

We envision:

- **Motivated people and groups**
- **Connected people (not necessarily geographically)**
- **People who take/find the time for their spiritual life**

In terms of the proposed priorities, the pursuit of greater contact and spiritual relationships among Friends resonated strongly with us, as did the responsibility to be an active voice in the world. We

recognize that other meetings may need programs for financial sustainability and outreach and we support work toward that end.

The priorities around **nurturing our children, youth, and young adults** seem weak and narrow. We feel that this priority needs significant attention to turn it into a creative, strategic, and progressive vision for all three of these demographic groupings. For example, a five-year vision of having YM staff support a certain aspect of MM life is too limiting of what could be achieved and how (i.e., not strategic). Another example is that for the young adult demographic, the report has no specific first-year actions nor a five-year vision (they fell off the map, it seems). What, specifically, did the Priorities Working Group hear or learn about the priority to nurture young adults?

We also have suggestions on the implementation portions of the report:

- What did the PWG hear or learn about how we might incorporate current institutions under NYYM care or with whom we are affiliated into the expression of these priorities? We think such exploration is critical, given the small size of the NYYM entity and the great potential for spreading and multiplying our efforts and energy with and through our affiliated bodies.
- Additional steps we would like to see in implementing greater contact and spiritual relationship among us include (1) forward-looking ways of maintaining meaningful contact among us (especially those in-between Meetings or without a nearby Meeting), i.e., Dial-a-Clearness-Committee, and (2) a nominating process that has nominating committee members visiting Monthly Meetings on a regular basis.

We have high hopes for what we can do better as a Yearly Meeting than as a collection of Monthly Meetings and appreciate how the leadings and priorities expressed so far responds to this. We offer these comments because we hope to do even better.