

Report from the Priorities Working Group Fall Sessions 2014

Following the approval of the revised Statement of Leadings and Priorities at Summer Sessions, the Priorities Working Group (PWG) reconvened in several telephone conferences and one in-person meeting to consider remaining tasks. During Summer Sessions, members of the PWG listened to Friends' concerns about how any set of Leadings and Priorities, and this set in particular, would be realized in our activities over the next four to six years, as directed in the minutes that established the working group. We resumed work on discerning and describing mechanisms for assuring the faithful use of the Leadings and Priorities in all the Yearly Meeting's functions and activities, with a concern that the processes also keep us whole and always open to the leadings of the Spirit.

We bring to Fall Sessions for FIRST READING proposals which we believe will assure that the Leadings and Priorities consistently guide decisions about the use of all our resources, including the use of staff and volunteer time, as well as financial commitments, and that will provide a process for assessing the implementation of the priorities. These proposals are in the form of minutes to be approved by the Body at Spring Sessions 2015. Because these are proposed minutes of the Body, the "we" in the proposals is the Yearly Meeting Body as a whole, not the PWG or other committee or group. Again, Friends here today are NOT being asked to approve these proposals at this time, but rather to sit with these proposals, share them with your meetings and together season them for action at Spring Sessions.

The first set of minutes envision way forward for implementing the approved Leadings and Priorities. They provide clear direction for Financial Services Committee to use the priorities in crafting annual budgets and to make necessary, and sometimes hard, decisions in allocating our financial resources. To further our commitment to make these "the Priorities of the Yearly Meeting as a whole" (Minute 2014-7-28), the proposed minutes also provide for coordination in making financial decisions through Financial Services Committee among all the groups in the Yearly Meeting with responsibilities for disbursing money. And the proposed minutes call for us to make a special effort to re-involve Regional Meeting Treasurers in the Yearly Meeting's budget development process.

The second set of minutes address our commitment to develop "an ongoing assessment process designed to encourage us to remain faithful to our leadings." (Minute 2011-4-39.) They establish a committee, the Priorities Assessment Committee, "[t]o advise Friends on progress, concerns and insights in the implementation of the approved Leadings and Priorities." In general, the Committee will be asked to actively seek out information and feedback from all parts of the Yearly Meeting – including both the monthly and regional meetings and the committees, staff and Friends involved in activities at the Yearly Meeting level – about how the regional and monthly meetings and the Yearly Meeting functioning "are being affected by the implementation of the Leadings and Priorities and how the Spirit is at work among Friends." And the Committee will report its findings, insights and concerns at least annually to Yearly Meeting sessions and to all the monthly and regional

meetings.

Friends often express consternation at the creation of a new Yearly Meeting committee, a concern that may be particularly apt in light of the hopes that the priorities will lead to a smaller formal structure. Mindful that committees have a capacity to outlast usefulness, the proposal to create a Priorities Assessment Committee includes a specific section on laying it down. We believe that within a limited lifespan, the committee will be able to provide lasting guidance on how to discern, update, implement and assess the implementation of the approved leadings and priorities.

We ask that everyone read and sit with the two sets of proposed minutes in their entirety, share them with your meetings and engage one another and the PWG in considering how these recommended actions can serve the needs of all parts of the Yearly Meeting.

The only action we are asking the body to consider at these Fall Sessions is to direct the Clerk to have these proposed minutes distributed to the monthly and regional meetings and to all Yearly Meeting committees, with the request that Friends review the proposals and direct comments or questions to the PWG through its recording clerk, Fred Dettmer (fdettmer@aol.com), by the end of March 2015. Friends should also be prepared to consider a request at Spring Sessions to lay down the PWG in conjunction with approving the proposed implementation and assessment minutes.

We thank you for your careful and spirit-led discernment on these proposals and will be happy to join you in prayerful consideration.

Elaine Learnard
Clerk, Priorities Working Group