Ad hoc Committee for NPYM Communications
Draft Fifth Month 2014

Background

At Annual Session of NPYM-2013 the Ad Hoc Committee to Evaluate the NPYM Structure recommended that an ad hoc committee explore better ways of communication within the YM. Suggested questions from that report are:

- What communications do we want/need, among whom, for what purposes?
- In what forms would communications take place?
- Who would oversee this?
- What would this cost and how would it be funded?

Also in the Ad Hoc Committee’s report there was a suggestion for some kind of periodical communication that would share, probably electronically, what was happening throughout the YM in its various committees, MMs/WGs, and in affiliated Quaker organizations. They noted that many expressed the need for a current NPYM Directory.

Committee Process

Our committee process was to meet at least monthly via telephone conference call. We also reached out to others in our yearly meeting:

- We interviewed a number of those in leadership positions in NPYM as to their perception of the strengths and difficulties of communication issues throughout the YM.

- We have, as committee members, asked representatives of our MM and Worship Groups as well as other Quaker friends for their thoughts. This produced a “laundry list” of simple things that might be done, many of which we have considered and mentioned in this report.

- The clerk of our committee spoke with the editor of the Western Friend in regards to communication through our magazine. In the next few years Western Friend plans to make use of many resources beyond the magazine, including on-line classes, links to other Quaker organizations, material for First Day School, and possibly simple summaries of activities in MMs and WGs in our YM. NPYM will need to stay aware of these efforts in order to cooperate and not duplicate any of these resources.
- We are planning an interest group at AS 2014 for more ideas which will be added to the final revision of this document.

In completion of our work we will share a report to the YM. We expect to lay this work down after AS 2014.

**Committee Concerns**

The Committee members believe that good communications at all levels is deeply embedded in the mission of NPYM. “To support one another, to strengthen one another in our divine search for Truth and Light” cannot be accomplished without members of our Yearly Meeting sharing the Spirit in our different and sometimes differing voices. Communication, whether verbal, written or spiritual, is implicit in our relationships with one another and the Spirit. The quality of communication reflects the health of a relationship and thus is a vital sign of the YM’s health.

This ad hoc committee soon identified concerns and questions which we felt needed to be addressed. They involve first our intended structure of responsibility and second our technological means of communications.

1) Friends in NPYM needs to understand better how lines of communication and responsibility are currently stated, used and perceived by members and groups throughout NPYM. NPYM also needs to make better known appropriate channels of communication within NPYM. For example, if an issue comes to our YM from another YM, or from our representatives to a Quaker organization who attends to this concern? In our current structure, a standing committee, such as the Peace and Social Concerns Committee, would look at the issue and then make recommendations for what to do with the concern. How does the concern get to the right committee? How does it work if the concern comes from a MM? Our committee is aware that not all of us, even in AS positions, understand good processes or correct procedures, even those set up in *Faith and Practice*. (See Appendix A—Information Flow Graphic)

2) Knowledge of our technological means of communication needs to be widespread. A member on our committee from the Information Technology Committee provided a list of the ways we currently communicate through technology (see Appendix B—Ways We Are Using Technology). This includes our website and e-mails sent out through our NPYM Secretary.

**Findings**

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Our findings are not easy to summarize as many of them come as queries about our priorities as a body and as individual Friends. Key to understanding communication in the YM is the experience of information coming as a flood of unconnected data. Recipients either struggle to digest, prioritize and share this information with their Meetings, or, they do not find it significant with respect to their primary concern of building the life of the local Meeting. There is also a concern that, in considering how to improve communication, Friends should not focus only on technical or organizational issues and should be mindful that the heart of communication for Friends rests on the personal and spiritual, on community and communion.

The findings we present are the themes we heard emerging from our interviews with Friends in which we asked for their concerns about NYPM communications. We heard that “it” was not about the website, but a need to encourage folks to use the web site. “It“ was not that Friends disliked the new structure, but rather Friends feeling that they did not have the time to read their e-mail and respond. “It” was not about the Coordinating Committee doing its job or not, but rather about Friends not prioritizing the time to come to such a meeting, or, if they were far removed geographically, not wanting to contribute to a larger carbon footprint by travel. Communication between Yearly and MM/WG’s has depended upon local Clerks to be the link, and this link has faltered at times for several reasons, including:

1) too many separate communications to sort through;

2) information that does not appear pertinent to the MM/WG; and/or

3) a greater need in some MM/WG to nurture their own community, rather than spread themselves thin in the YM.

Some of those interviewed reflected a need for more spiritual connection. One Friend stated that, “Friends are not hearing one another well because we do not take the time as individuals, or in working groups, to listen to the Inner Light/Seed/Guide within us and the fruits of that Seed in others.” This Friend hopes our committee does not recommend another committee, but rather that we become a guide to greater simplicity and purer intention. Another Friend stated that perhaps YM and AS just don’t hold much relevance, and folks are not emotionally invested in good communication. Perhaps the issue is more about how to make more meaning and connections for those members who do not feel involved. A number of Friends worry that the general culture of work and outside interests overwhelms the commitment to spiritual growth and values. We may need reminding of the importance of making room in our lives for those Quaker practices that allow us to listen to our Guide and open to the Spirit. Or in the words of another Quaker, “we no longer value and practice the attention it takes to be a Quaker, following a Spirit-led life.”
Have we dedicated and simplified our lives enough to place Quaker fellowship and communion as a priority?

We heard about the power of personal stories as occurred at FCNL’s annual conference when their interns shared their involvement in social action. What these young people shared was so moving that the whole conference moved into Worship. It was suggested that this is the kind of sharing we need that will bring us all more into alignment with one another and the Spirit.

*How do we share our personal leadings, insights, and experiences so that all can learn and be guided?*

Another example of good involvement/communication was the January 2014 Consultation by the Ministry and Oversight Committee. They had great attendance because the topic (Disruptive Behavior) was important and of interest to the MMs and Worship Groups. The leadership also made phone calls ahead of time personally inviting folks to attend. Personal contact and invitation is a powerful stimulant to participation.

*How do we invite Friends to join in with all the activities and opportunities for connection in the YM? How do we facilitate individuals taking the initiative to involve others?*

Recently, the Peace and Social Concerns Committee of NPYM sent out an 11 page composite of what different MM/WG were doing throughout our NPYM in areas of peace and social testimonies. This report went to the clerks of all MM and WG. It was well received in many MM and WG and is a positive example of strong communication offering a sense of Spirit moving amongst us all.

**In summary, we find there are three different communication challenges for NPYM Friends:**

- **Deepening the Quality of Communication:**

  1) Prioritize the Yearly Meeting mission “to strengthen one another in our search Divine Truth and Light.” Provide more opportunities for spiritual exchange and Divine-centered relationships throughout our region. Two examples of this could be a phone or on-line worship sharing, or a spiritual practice support group. Can we use YM structures better to help local groups minister more effectively among/to their members?

  2) Reach out to and draw in newcomers, including possible use of materials like Quaker Quest ([http://www.quakerquest.org/](http://www.quakerquest.org/)). This material would cost money and
may be something the YM wants to make available. Outreach and Visitation Committee is already preparing to link our Website to the New Meetings program material at Friends General Conference, an example of one way to expand our reach and make use of materials economically.¹

3) Arrange visitations like the Brinton Visitor of the past and more inter-visitation among Friends throughout our region. This would require a volunteer committee to arrange this process and money for travel which would need to be allocated from the budget of NPYM.

4) Encourage participation on a committee in NPYM as a way of deepening Quaker connections and community. We have all found that working together builds bonds both of friendship and spiritual understanding.

- **System and Organizational improvements:**
  
  1) Reassigning tasks that have been lost in the reorganization of NPYM, e.g., gathering information from MM newsletters and then widely sharing the new and good, the joys and sorrows [at one time done by Quarterly contacts for the *Bulletin/Western Friend* and later by FWCC staff]. Perhaps some of these functions, formerly done (informally?) by the regular contacts of the Steering Clerk, could today be vested in either the Presiding Clerk or the Clerk of the CC. In doing this, care would have to be taken to define or delimit overlapping areas of responsibility.

  2) Training recording clerks in making standardized minutes which are clear, concise, and define who will carry out specified tasks and responsibilities, while providing enough narrative to explain the rationale for decisions.

  3) Educating e-mail authors to simplify emails, to make them succinct and clear so that they will communicate effectively. An e-mail could be distributed which offered suggestions and useful frameworks for the writing of clear emails, including the following suggestions:
    
    a) The subject line should clearly state the missive’s content so that it easier to retrieve in the future.
    
    b) Each e-mail should state the responsibility of the recipient; what applies to whom, and what are the next steps to be taken.
    
    c) Short and concise messages will be read more thoroughly by more people.
    
    d) Important phrases, dates, and locations in **bold** will convey the most vital information quickly.

¹ In 2012 the travels and visitation of the Friend-in Residence required approximately $1800, much of which was budgeted in the AS F-in-R line.
e) Make necessary adjustments if one's own e-mail account is bouncing communications.

4) Providing on our website opportunities for self-initiated forums and bulletin boards where Friends can make contact; this would require some monitoring [i.e. volunteer time] to prevent abuse. Overall we must work to make our website and other technological communications easily accessible, attractive, and affordable to all.

- **Technological improvements:**
  These include making sure that the NPYM office has up-to-date and functional equipment that will allow the staff to disseminate information and maintain both the directory and the web-site to their potential and thus both create and serve demand for a stable source of information about both the YM and its constituents. The Technology Committee needs to review many aspects of this and make recommendations. This will involve costs and time commitment changes. We will support anything that:
  
  1) **simplifies** getting regular distribution on a wide basis of all the information that everyone in the YM needs to know; e.g. a quarterly newsletter (keeping aware that older technologies have certain advantages and are required for many individuals to be included);
  2) **facilitates** individuals easily finding the answers to questions they may have, including contacting key committee clerks and officers, and even to questions they did not know they had [e.g. hotlinks on the website];
  3) **directs** critical information and leadership data to the individuals who will take responsible action [e.g. improved mailing lists and actions that elicit compliance from those who receive information so they are not bottlenecks].

(See Appendix C---Resource for Quaker process in using technology)

**Responsibility and Implementation**

If this report is accepted by NPYM, then it will be necessary for people in positions of leadership to consciously work to implement the aforementioned suggestions, incorporating them into the good work within their purview. In each section the people responsible have been underlined.

We note with gratitude that successful examples of these suggestions have already been put into practice; indeed, they inspired these suggestions. We endorse the continuation and expansion of these efforts.

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RA recommended resource for Quaker process while using technology, *Quaker Process for Friends on the Benches* by Mathilda Navias.

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Responsibility to Deepen the Quality of Communication:

Communication is a spiritual endeavor; it connotes the multiple ways that the Light within each of us reaches another. To take the time to craft one's words carefully and succinctly is a gift of clarity to oneself, to the listener/reader, to the Meeting community, and ultimately, to Spirit itself. On a basic level, every one of us has the capacity and responsibility to improve communication with the intention of deepening both one's own spiritual practice and the spiritual connections and empowerment we have as a community.

On all levels (MM, QM, and AS), those who are clerks, and those on Ministry and Oversight committees have the greatest ability-to-respond to the programmatic suggestions regarding 1) prioritizing opportunities for spiritual sharing; 2) outreach to newcomers; and 3) visitations. We encourage NPYM to take initiative in these areas, and establish collaborations with our smaller entities. We encourage all Friends to respond to 4) the call to participate in committees.

Responsibility for System and Organizational Improvements

1) Reassigning lost tasks should be decided upon by the Presiding Clerk, the Clerk of Coordinating Committee and the Coordinating Committee. Nominating Committee could also be involved. Clarifying procedures is the responsibility of all clerks. Please refer to Faith and Practice. Keep in mind the concept of institutional memory and pass on these practices to new Friends.

2) Training for recording clerks and standardizing minutes is in the purview of the clerks of the standing committees as well as the ad hoc committees that are formed. Support for these clerks can also be found in Faith and Practice as well as Quaker Process for Friends on the Bench by Mathilda Navies.

3) The suggestions to improve email communication are the responsibility of every Friend who sends an email.

4) Website improvements may require budget allocation and would be supervised by the Technology and Information Committee.

Responsibility for Technological Improvements

As noted, the YM Information Technology Committee will play a key role in analyzing our equipment and systems needs. The responsibility for implementation of suggested changes will fall back on clerks, Coordinating Committee and the budget process as well as individuals’ leadings to volunteer the necessary time to make changes.

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Challenges we still face

Many of us are yearning for a healthy, vibrant Yearly Meeting which will draw us in, feed us and encourage our Spirits to grow. We are caught in the paradox of expectations inherent in nurturing our own meetings and worship groups close to home, while also contributing to the whole. As an all volunteer organization, with minimal paid staff, we are also caught in the tension between our often demanding work and home lives and the further commitment of time and effort needed for the sustenance of our Quaker community and organization. How is the Society of Friends not only to stay alive, but support and model our faith for the next generation? How should NPYM work as a coherent system supporting the Monthly Meetings, the Quarterly Meetings and Yearly Meeting? Listening closely to the Light we will find Living Waters to guide us.

Repeatedly we need to find ways to proclaim the vision and shared goals that unite us. Can we find ways to communicate that will allow us to do this in love and trust, building authentic relationship among us and helping us stay centered in the Light that is the foundation for true community? Making a commitment to the Society of Friends is demanding but many of us would have it no other way. We are convinced that this is who we are. Together we must make decisions in unity with the Spirit which underlies and guides us all, so that our outcomes are indeed reflective of God’s will as best we can discern it for this group at this time.

~The ad hoc Committee, Lucretia Humphrey, clerk
  Jane Ewert,
  Laurie Childers,
  Pablo Stanfield,
  Carol Uhte,
  Clint Weimeister

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Appendix A—Information Flow Graph

Orange 5-point stars=Clerks, yellow 4-point stars=MM,

Information flow to the local Meeting

Monthly Meetings and worship groups have a clerk (or contact person) who is designated to receive all incoming communication and make sure that information flows to the appropriate recipient or is responded to. Of course this becomes a bottleneck if a deluge of input arrives, some of it in a mass and some of it unclear. We assume that information is shared within a local meeting, but that is not always true. Because some people are drawn toward one of the focuses of the community and others toward a different one, connections are not always made.
Appendix B—Ways We Are Using Technology

1. NPYM webpage - [npym.org](http://npym.org) - This page was recently redesigned and now uses a content management system which offers additional opportunities. Mostly this page is an internal means of communication for Quakers in the yearly meeting. Aside from perhaps locating meetings, there is little else that speaks to our condition for non-Friends or seekers.

2. E-mail - we send most of the emails for the yearly meeting through the NPYM Secretary. Other e-mails are to those we know and whose e-mail contact addresses one has collected. We have little choice about what we receive, and may not reach all the people we might want to.

3. Directory - this is a database of names, addresses, etc. which can be used to communicate, but we have yet to develop a plan on how to effectively use data. Much concern is expressed about privacy when we talk about databases. (Nowadays there are adequate ways to protect the electronic database equivalent to the print version we already distributed.

4. Online registration - perhaps one useful tool to get people to AS.

5. Face book and other social media. Mostly this is done by individuals and has not been developed by NPYM. Younger Friends (I think) relate to this media, although many of us are on Face book. Some groups use networking for their programs (e.g. Way of the Spirit uses Ning).

6. Caringbridge - many people have used this site for dying or ailing members.

7. Regular mail (aka snail mail) - still in use by many of us.

8. Telephone - also useful for many - We do conference calls, and make individual calls.

9. Text messaging - maybe a little use here, but I'm not hearing a lot of people says 'text me'


11. Weekly announcements – e-mailed or printed. Available at meeting on Sunday or sometimes mailed.

12. Face-to-face meetings.

13. Doodle and other meeting scheduling programs.

14. Google (searches, docs, hangouts, ...) - Aren't they doing everything yet?

NPYM Website

This is a quick sitemap. There are other pieces imbedded in minutes and as attachments. e.g. Memorial Minutes are attached to the AS Minutes. These could be moved to a better place and made more noticeable. The calendars and individual meetings pages can be updated by the NPYM Secretary directly. We have the potential to have other pages that are handled by individuals directly (without needing to go through the web keeper). Several items are linked to
more than one location, e.g. job descriptions.

Annual Session

Current (information about current or most recent session)
   Minutes
   Epistles
   Epistles Received by NPYM
   also Registration and related material
Past Sessions
   Minutes
   History
   Clerks

Structure
   Coordinating Committee
   Standing Committees
   Ad Hoc Committees
   Reps to Orgs
   other reports and documents
   Nominating Committee
   Job Descriptions
   Executive Committee
   Treasurer
   Policy and Bylaws

Who We Are
   Member Meetings
   Youth
   Young Adult Friends
   Junior Friends
   Central Friends
   Youth Opportunity Fund
   Youth Safety Policy

   NPYM Grid

What We Believe

   Faith and Practice
      1993 Version
      Transitional Version
Revision Overview
Revision Outline
Study Guide and Responses
Epistles
Minutes

Resources (links to Quaker orgs)
Western Friend
Calendars
   Events
   Conference Calls

Contact Us (form to contact NPYM clerks, etc)