AD HOC EXTERNAL QUAKER RELATIONSHIPS COMMITTEE REPORT

To: North Pacific Yearly Meeting Annual Session
From: Ad Hoc Committee of NPYM on External Quaker Relationships
Date: July, 2013

History

At the Annual Session of 2010, a committee on possible affiliation with Friends General Conference was formed. This group reported to Yearly Meeting at the Annual Sessions in 2011 and 2012. During Annual Session 2012 it became apparent that Friends did not have unity around the question of affiliation; many favored affiliation, but some were strongly held in opposition. Concerns included the following: importance of our history as an independent unaffiliated yearly meeting, the costs involved in having representatives serve on our behalf with FGC, some discomfort with FGC as an organization, and leadings toward interactions with other branches of Friends.

During plenary sessions, it became apparent that affiliation, as a term, was a problem because it implies a level of kinship and exclusivity with which we were not fully at ease. What was discerned as needed was a functional definition of what our relationships could be, not just with FGC but will all branches of Quakerism. The committee reporting here was formed as the Ad Hoc Committee of NPYM on External Quaker Relationships. We were charged with looking at each branch of Quakerism and thinking of how we might act in relationship to each branch. We were asked to report to Annual Session in 2013 and make any proposals around which we have come to unity.

Work of the Committee

We have met almost monthly since Annual Session 2012. Several of the original members have resigned from the committee for various personal reasons. The members now include Lynn Fitz-Hugh (co-clerk), Patty Lyman (co-clerk), Kathy Hyzy, Margaret Coahran, Bill Ashworth, Eddy Crouch, Molly Cooley, and Angie Alexander. Our committee is fairly diverse in terms of having Friends from several Quarters as well as some gender and age balance. We hold a variety of beliefs and feelings about the different branches of Friends and thus have trusted our discernment to be fairly representative of the Yearly Meeting.

We divided the task of doing research on the various branches of Quakerism. We specifically looked for information about how often they meet, opportunities offered to members and non-members alike to gather for business or fellowship, what services and resources they provide, and the values statements of these various organizations. We discussed what we perceived to be points of either connection or tension between our Yearly Meeting and each group. We then discussed what we saw as a desirable way for our Yearly Meeting to relate to each branch. An Information Sheet based on the results of this study is included with this report.

We also consulted the Yearly Meeting membership, through a survey posted on the Survey Monkey website. The results are summarized below; the complete results are included as a separate document, and are also available on the Yearly Meeting website.
We should point out here that there is an exciting and dynamic group known as Convergent Friends which has not been covered in our work because we were charged at looking only at our relationship to other branches of Friends, and the Convergent Friends are a cross-branch movement. More information about Convergent Friends can be found at http://www.convergentfriends.org/

An Opening and Our Response

We were contacted soon after annual session by a Friend who had spoken during plenary session against affiliation with FGC. In reflection about what had been said during that plenary session, he arrived at a proposal that he forwarded to this committee: that NPYM create a fund to assist individual Friends in traveling for ministry, study, or exposure to other Friends groups. He suggested that such travel and participation would "open the way to growth in love and understanding." He also suggested that a committee could advertise opportunities and select candidates from those Friends who showed interest.

Our committee has enthusiastically taken up this idea. We recognize that Friends in the Yearly Meeting do not feel equally close to all branches of Quakers, but that leadings of individuals are important both historically and currently. We also know that not all have equal opportunities to follow their leadings due to time and financial constraints, and we anticipate that such realities would be considered in the selection of who would be supported in traveling. The review committee would receive letters from Friends proposing an intended visitation to another branch, as well as traveling letters of support from their monthly meetings. Support from the NPYM fund would be granted as funds allowed, and would be based on discernment of the appropriateness of the leading. If multiple candidates asked for support to attend the same gathering of another branch of Friends, the review committee would discern who might be most appropriate as an observer from our Yearly Meeting. If the fund were to be established as one to which Friends could donate, independently of the regular assessments, it would ease the problem of raising NPYM assessments to cover this activity.

We suggest that the Outreach and Visitation Committee is the appropriate standing committee to be tasked with this work.

Finally and most importantly, we believe that the discussions at annual session about affiliation with FGC, combined with our discernments as a committee, reflect a need for Friends of NPYM to carefully and fully work toward a better understanding of our own identity as a yearly meeting with attention paid to both our history and current discernment of our place in the world of Quakers.
NPYM PARTICIPANTS SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

NPYM Friends have good familiarity with the various other branches of Friends. Although only about 45% of us are familiar with Conservative Friends, well over half of us know about Evangelical Friends Church International (EFCI) and Friends United Meeting (FUM), and nearly 100% of us know about Friends General Conference (FGC). Over half of us believe our relationship to other branches of Friends are very important, and a nearly equal number would like to see more attempts made to connect with other branches and disseminate information about them. Less than 1% disapprove of this idea.

When it comes to getting specific about which branches we want to connect to, and how we want to connect, however, things are somewhat less clear.

9% of us have been members of an EFCI church in the past, and nearly 40% of us have used Barclay Press materials. Well over 50% of us are satisfied with our current relationship to this body. Nearly 80% of us are familiar with Northwest Yearly Meeting - the EFCI body that shares our geographical area - and over half of those who know about it are satisfied with our current relationship with them. Fewer than 10% want us to reduce this relationship.

Nearly 40% have also used FUM books and curricula. 14% of us have attended FUM meetings, and nearly the same number have some relationship to Earlham College or Earlham School of Religion. 60% of us would like to maintain or increase our connection with FUM, and only 5% would like us to connect with them less.

Only 37% of us have much familiarity with Conservative Friends, and over 40% of us are unfamiliar with them. However, we seem to be quite interested in them: 67% of survey respondents would like to maintain or increase our connection, and less than 4% want no relationship with them at all.

FGC is clearly in a class by itself. 45% of survey respondents have belonged to an FGC meeting in the past, more than half of us have attended the Gathering, and more than 95% of us have used their materials. Well over half of our meetings have had a traveling FGC program visit, or have held the FGC-sponsored Quaker Quest workshop. More than 20% of us have drawn on their building assistance fund. Given all of that, it is no surprise to see that nearly half of us (47%) want to affiliate with them. A significant additional number (20%) describe themselves as conflicted about affiliation. 36% want to send an annual donation, and more than 20% want us to send an observer or representative to their Central Governing Committee. Fewer than 8% want no additional relationship.

It has been suggested that we set up a fund to receive donations to assist Friends who wish to attend other branches with their travel costs, and discern who among those requesting funding should receive it. Nearly half of us approve of that idea, and another 45% want more information about it; just 5% are opposed.