Background Information on Affiliation with Friends General Conference

NPYM FGC Seasoning Committee
May 15, 2012

Introduction

At our 2011 Annual Session, NPYM received a report from the ad hoc committee that had been established in 2010 to consider the question of affiliating with Friends General Conference. That ad hoc committee recommended affiliating with FGC and also suggested that the matter would need to season for a time before we were ready to make a decision as a yearly meeting. A new ad hoc committee was initiated with the charge of assisting with the seasoning process leading up to the 2012 Annual Session.

Our current reading of the Yearly Meeting is that we have a significant range of thought on this subject and that NPYM will be continuing to season this question at the time of Annual Session 2012 and likely beyond. As with any deliberation involving conflicting points of view and strong feelings, Friends endeavor to take great care to listen, to be tender toward one another, and to yield to the divine promptings that may lead us beyond the confines of our individual starting points. It is important for us in NPYM to take the time and care to listen deeply to each other, to wait patiently, and to move as, and only as, we as one body are led.

As background for our Annual Session 2012, this document offers a brief history of the subject of NPYM’s consideration of FGC affiliation, addresses common questions, and suggests queries that might assist us in our further consideration of the subject.

The Work of the Original Ad-Hoc Committee on FGC Affiliation

In early 2010, the NPYM Coordinating Committee appointed a committee to consider whether North Pacific Yearly Meeting should affiliate with Friends General Conference. The five members of this original ad-hoc committee to study the question were: Carl Abbott, convener (Multnomah), Lynn Fitz-Hugh (Eastside), Tom Head (Bridge City), Otis Kenny (Boise Valley), and Lee Neff (South Seattle). A six-page document, "FGC Affiliation Committee Report, June 10, 2011," summarized the work and recommendations of this task force. That report was circulated as one of the background papers for Annual Session 2011 and is available on the NPYM website at: http://www.npym.org/docs/ad-hoc-committees/FGC_Affiliation_Final_Report.pdf

As documented in that report, background information and suggested queries were circulated to all monthly meetings and worship groups in NPYM. Meetings were asked during 2010-11 to consider the question and to provide feedback. The committee received and considered input from monthly meetings, worship groups and individual Friends. At the end of a year of fact-finding, consultation, and deliberation, the committee prayerfully
Considered what to report to the yearly meeting. In a time of gathered worship at the end of our work together, the committee found clarity around the following minute:

> We recommend that North Pacific Yearly Meeting affiliate with Friends General Conference. Recognizing and respecting that there are significant reservations and concerns of both practical and spiritual nature, as well as the likely need for more information, we request that this recommendation season for a year to allow consultation among meetings and individuals.

It is likely to be helpful to summarize here what led to this decision.

**Why Affiliate?**

The recommendation to affiliate emerged from a sense that we in North Pacific Yearly Meeting already have a significant degree of relatedness to FGC and that, at this point in our development as a yearly meeting, it makes sense to recognize this connectedness and to move toward greater participation in the work of FGC. It was also an acknowledgement that the preponderance of the replies received either favored affiliation or indicated a willingness to accept whatever direction the yearly meeting decided upon.

To some degree, this step might be seen as one of affirming a number of existing ties and living into fuller opportunities afforded by these. While not entirely analogous to the decision that an individual makes around monthly meeting membership, this step might be thought of as something like the one taken by a long-time attender who feels that the time for formal association with the larger body has come. It is quite possible for an attender to go on forever being a participant in the life of the meeting without formalizing his or her connection to a monthly meeting. Similarly, it is not imperative that NPYM affiliate with FGC. NPYM could go on for a good long time as we are now doing. But the step of affiliation is making sense to Friends in NPYM who know FGC well, participate in its work, and benefit from its programs.

Examples of our connectedness to FGC’s work and activity include the following: We often draw upon FGC educational materials for both youth and adult programs. We use "Quaker Books" as a key outlet for stocking meeting and home libraries. We borrow money from the Friends Meeting House Fund to finance our places of worship. We have helped to host an FGC Gathering in the Pacific Northwest (2006). Several NPYM Friends have led workshops at past Gatherings, and many of us report experiencing Gatherings as something that strengthens our life and witness as Friends. It is common for NPYM groups to sing from *Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal*, which was the culmination of a decade of work by the FGC Hymnal Oversight Committee. One of our monthly meetings, Olympia Friends Meeting, is already affiliated with FGC and speaks positively of this experience. We in NPYM cross paths and from time to time work with others in the West who are affiliated with FGC including Quakers from Alaska Friends Conference, InterMountain Yearly Meeting, monthly meetings in Davis and Sacramento, California, the Wyoming Friends Meeting, and western Friends in Canadian Yearly Meeting. Many Friends who have moved into the Pacific Northwest from other parts of the country have been part of yearly meetings that are affiliated with FGC and find NPYM to be a yearly meeting that is in most
respects not discernably different from other unprogrammed Friends in North America.

For many, the opportunity to connect with a wider group of Quakers, made up largely of unprogrammed and nonpastoral Friends, expands our network of Friends and reinforces our lives as Quakers. For these Friends, affiliation with a larger body of like-minded and similarly experienced Quakers seems to be a natural part of our growth and development as a yearly meeting. And for some, it seems odd that we might argue for distancing ourselves from those with whom we have much in common.

**Concerns about Affiliation**

The Ad-Hoc Committee also heard reservations about taking such a step. Some Friends were either on the fence or hesitant about affiliation, and a few felt that affiliation with FGC would be a grave mistake. Two significant areas of concern—the issue of identity and the burden of costs—emerged, and it would be useful to review how the ad-hoc committee came to see these issues.

The ad hoc committee endeavored to receive all concerns with tenderness, respect, and worshipful consideration. Yet, in the end, the committee had to grapple with the fact that not all of us in NPYM see these subjects in the same way. Eventually the committee needed to process what were, quite literally, conflicting views. The committee strove to respect both the many opinions favoring affiliation as well as the heartfelt objections, and hopefully the reflections offered here will help to give a sense of how that committee navigated conflicting currents. As a small ‘task-force’ studying the matter, the original Ad-Hoc Committee was able to find clarity about the reasonableness of affiliation with FGC after weighing all concerns; however, the committee was also aware that the yearly meeting as a whole would need to settle into its own period of discernment to find what its unity might be. The original ‘task force’ gathered input, studied this matter, and came to some conclusions, but it is important to note that the conclusions represented the unity of a committee and not the unity of the larger body as a whole. It was clear that further seasoning would be needed to reach NPYM’s unity one way or another, and it also seemed possible that an additional period of seasoning would not result in unity.

While this question has multiple dimensions, there are two primary subjects, which seem to represent central areas of disagreement:

First, with respect to identity issues, we are drawn into a consideration of who and what is NPYM. One approach to characterizing the yearly meeting flows from studying the history of Friends, but what part of our Quaker history to emphasize is something about which one hears various perspectives. Some of us place considerable emphasis on the experiences of Joel and Hannah Bean in the decades preceding the formation of Pacific Yearly Meeting. However, others of us will draw upon a long procession of many other historical Quaker figures and do not emphasize one or two persons, a single time period or a single location as the primary element defining our spiritual community. It is quite true that the Beans disliked the divisions of their day and did not want to be part of them. Their
example inspires us and recalling their history has been important to us broadly, yet as the
ad-hoc committee considered the matter, the legacy of Joel and Hannah Bean did not seem
to present a clear implication one way or the other for NPYM’s decisions about
participation in FGC today. Not all of us will agree with this conclusion.

Looking more fully into the question of identity, it becomes especially important for
us to find clarity about whether or not association with FGC would require us to forsake
who we are. This is a key issue that needs fuller consideration in the months and perhaps
years to come. The original Ad-Hoc Committee, rightly or wrongly, came to see FGC as a
diverse and inclusive body in much the same way that NPYM is diverse and inclusive. Also
of note is the fact that several yearly meetings within FGC have reunited and put aside
divisions of the past, developments which are consistent with perspectives valued in
NPYM. While individual persons might argue one way or another about their personal
identity as Quakers, NPYM as a whole seems to be a radically diverse and inclusive body
worshipping in an unprogrammed, non-pastoral tradition. In this sense, the Ad-Hoc
committee reasoned that affiliation with FGC would not so much represent an alignment
with a narrow fragment or schism but rather with what is today a broadly based
community of unprogrammed and nonpastoral Quakers throughout North America.
Whether or not this understanding is accurate is something we can and will respectfully
discuss with each other.

Second, the issue of costs and resources has been a concern, and this is a specific
instance of the general concern that we have been discussing about representation to all of
the Quaker organizations with which we are affiliated. Can we afford the money involved?
Do we have the people needed? These are important questions, and affiliating would mean
that we would need to budget to cover the costs of this engagement. It is clear that FGC is
important to many of us. There is little doubt that the yearly meeting would find Friends
willing to serve in various capacities; in fact, several NPYM members are already doing so.
Whether or not we could adequately budget for the financial costs is less clear, and this is
an important area for further discernment by NPYM. Some inaccurate or maximum
projections have confused this particular issue, but there is no doubt that costs are an
important consideration.

In researching this issue the ad-hoc committee learned that the cost of affiliation
could be scaled according to our abilities. With respect to financial obligations to FGC,
affiliated bodies are expected to contribute financially but there is no stipulated or required
assessment; the appropriate level is a decision reached by each affiliated group. And with
respect to travel expenses, the committee reasoned that we could scale our representation
along the lines that made sense to us (e.g., sending one or two representative rather than
three, etc.). So while the committee heard concerns for how affiliation would impact the
budget, we also understood that there were many possible ways for the Yearly Meeting to
address this particular issue. If affiliation is desirable to the Yearly Meeting, it does appear
that there would be ways to find the needed resources, but perhaps the most critical issue
for the yearly meeting is to decide our desired relatedness to FGC. If and when we find
clarity on this, it is likely that budgeting a resource commitment that is appropriate and
feasible will naturally follow.
The Work of the FGC Seasoning Committee

In keeping with the recommendations of the original ad-hoc committee, a seasoning committee was established to assist the yearly meeting as it considers it relatedness to FGC. As we have proceeded with our work, the Seasoning Committee has been humbly reminded of the limited role that any handful of Friends plays in the larger work that belongs to all of us in NPYM as the whole community participates in the process of Quaker discernment and decision-making. Throughout this past year we have felt that the committee has been too small for the work at hand; we would like to have been able to do far more than has been possible under the circumstances.

There are some specifics that we can mention at this time. We have been making regular reports to the NPYM Coordinating Committee, and we are planning to report to a plenary at Annual Session 2012. Also at Annual Session 2012 we will conduct an interest group at which we will report on our work this past year and offer an opportunity for further conversation. As we are able, we are happy to meet with any Friend(s) wishing such an opportunity. We urge Friends unfamiliar with FGC to spend some time getting to know what it is and what it does, and some resources for doing so are listed below. And finally, at the end of this document, we suggest a few queries that may be of some use as our hearts and minds are prepared for corporate decision-making.

About FGC

Many of us know FGC from participating in its programs and using its resources. One way to learn more about FGC is to talk with Friends in NPYM who have been actively involved in FGC activities. Whether quite familiar with FGC or entirely new to the organization, it will be useful for all of us to review information on the FGC website: http://www.fgcquaker.org/ Included on that website is the following statement of purpose (2009):

Friends General Conference, with Divine guidance, nurtures the spiritual vitality of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) by providing programs and services for Friends, meetings, and seekers.

Major Goals

1. Nurture meetings and worship groups.
2. Provide resources and opportunities for meetings, Friends, and seekers to experience the Light, the living presence of God.
3. Help meetings guide Friends to discern the leadings of the Inward Teacher and to grow into ministry.
4. Transform our awareness so that our corporate and individual attitudes and actions fully value and encompass the blessed diversity of our human family.
5. Work to grow and sustain a vital, diverse, and loving community of Friends based on a shared search for unity in the Spirit.
6. Articulate, communicate, and exemplify Friends’ practices, core experiences, and the call to live and witness to our faith.
7. Promote dialogue with others, sharing with them our corporate experience of Divine Truth and listening to and learning from their experience of the same.

Also included on the FGC website is a current list of affiliated yearly and monthly meetings. The links provide opportunities to explore in turn the websites of each of these bodies:

**Yearly Meetings** (with membership totals)

- **Alaska Friends Conference** (250)
- **Baltimore Yearly Meeting** (4,746)
- **Canadian Yearly Meeting** (1,216)
- **Illinois Yearly Meeting** (1,212)
- **InterMountain Yearly Meeting** (1,008)
- **Lake Erie Yearly Meeting** (712)
- **New England Yearly Meeting** (4,164)
- **New York Yearly Meeting** (3,512)
- **Northern Yearly Meeting** (1,475)
- **Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting** (783)
- **Philadelphia Yearly Meeting** (11,746)
- **Piedmont Friends Fellowship** (900)
- **South Central Yearly Meeting** (446)
- **Southeastern Yearly Meeting** (570)
- **Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting & Association** (1,245)

**Monthly Meetings**

- **Central City, Nebraska**
- **Davis, California**
- **Heartland, Kansas**
- **Fairhope, Alabama**
- **Five Rivers, South Carolina**
- **Manhattan, Kansas**
- **Olympia, Washington**
- **Oread, Kansas**
- **Sacramento, California**
- **Topeka, Kansas**
- **Wyoming, Wyoming**
One of the many helpful items on the FGC website is a section on affiliation; one item in that section is the following: http://www.fgcquaker.org/files/FGC_BenefitsAffiliation_Jun07.pdf
Included in that document is FGC’s own perspective on how it sees the question of identity:

FGC sees itself primarily as a service organization, not a separate branch of the Religious Society of Friends. Several of our yearly meetings are also affiliated with Friends United Meeting, and include programmed as well as unprogrammed monthly meetings. We do not expect our affiliates to alter their identity or give up other ties or affiliations. In fact, we welcome this kind of cross-fertilization, and we believe it enriches our shared spiritual life as Friends. FGC wants to serve Friends and nourish their spiritual growth, not define their beliefs or direct their spiritual journey.

Additional portions of that section describe the process of affiliation, the first step of which is writing a letter of interest to FGC’s Advancement and Outreach Committee that in turn begins a discernment process.

**Suggested Queries**

It is clear that our current views on the idea of FGC affiliation are not uniform. We in NPYM have different understandings of what affiliation might mean and different perspectives on the wisdom of moving forward on the recommendation to affiliate. How do Friends proceed when differences are present? We do so carefully, tenderly, and with openness to change. The Seasoning Committee offers the following queries as vehicles for our ongoing process of discerning a way forward on this topic. We encourage Friends in NPYM to use any of these queries that serve needs and to leave those that do not. These may be used for group consideration as well as personal reflection.

1. **Personal History.** As individuals we start the discernment process with different personal histories. Each of our journeys is meaningful and important and is part of the fabric of our yearly meeting community as a whole.

   *What is your history with Friends? How does this frame your understanding of FGC and how NPYM relates to FGC? What are you learning about your own history and the journeys of others in NPYM?*

2. **Personal Preference.** Personal preference is one way that we think about the affiliation question. The seasoning committee has heard from many Friends about their individual likes and dislikes. Some have deep connections to FGC and great personal enthusiasm for the organization. Others seem to experience personal dismay, disappointment or even hurt at the idea of affiliation. All of our personal experiences and preferences are to be held tenderly and respectfully, but ultimately this alone will not get us to a group decision.
As you listen to each and all of us in the yearly meeting, what are you hearing that speaks to the question of our movement toward unity? How are you participating in making a decision that will serve well the yearly meeting as a whole?

3. Independence. We often speak of NPYM as an independent yearly meeting. This subject emerges as a pivotal element in our deliberations.

What does independence mean to you? What aspects of independence might be compromised or weakened by affiliation with FGC? What aspects of independence could continue or even be strengthened by affiliation with FGC? What actions can we take, whether affiliated or not with FGC, to build our relationships with other bodies of Friends and other communities of faith?

4. Change. When we do not have initial clarity on a proposal, the movement toward unity usually requires seeing things differently and growing into new things.

If you initially found yourself in favor of the idea of affiliation, how would NPYM be changed if we came to a conclusion to reject the recommendation to affiliate with FGC? Or, if you initially found yourself objecting to the idea of affiliation, how would NPYM be changed if we came to a conclusion to affiliate with FGC? What 'new things' can you envision?

5. Young Friends. The impact on youth and younger Friends emerges as a topic for further discussion.

What attracts people in their 20’s and 30’s to a Meeting? What helps keep young people raised in a Meeting involved in the Society of Friends? What programming and outreach to young Friends do we envision? What roles do a yearly meeting serve in this regard? What functions do larger Quaker bodies serve? If NPYM hired a Youth Coordinator, what would we envision for this role? How does this relate or not relate to the question of affiliation with FGC?

This document has been prepared by NPYM’s Friends General Conference (FGC) Seasoning Committee: Lynn Fitz-Hugh (Eastside), Tom Head, clerk (Bridge City), and Otis Kenny (Boise Valley).