History

Beginnings

The Religious Society of Friends has a long history that dates back to the 1600s in England. There are many comprehensive works, some of which are listed in the bibliography, that explore that history in depth. What is related here is only a brief overview.

In the 1650s, George Fox along with others in England started what they hoped would be a revival of authentic Christianity. They called themselves the Friends of Truth. They taught that people should listen primarily to the voice of God within themselves, eliminating the need for priest intermediaries, as well as other external elements of religious practice, such as elaborate church buildings, rituals, or signs of outward authority. Friends followed the Inward Christ and placed less importance on Scripture than other Protestants did. Their core beliefs included the ministry of all believers, a rejection of creeds, spiritual equality, an emphasis on inward sacraments over ritual, and a deep and practical commitment to integrity and pacifism. In a short time the movement spread. Soon, with the help of Margaret Fell, it gained a headquarters and an able administrator.

Not all were in agreement with the Friends of Truth, particularly established church and civic leaders. Many Friends were imprisoned, fined, or otherwise persecuted. Eventually a committee in London called the Meeting for Sufferings was set up to assist those Friends who were undergoing persecution.

As the movement grew, George Fox and Margaret Fell established an organization that relied on local worshiping communities as the base. These usually met twice each week, on Sunday and midweek. They conducted business once a month using group discernment and were called monthly meetings. Friends saw the process of coming to unity in a group discernment of the Divine as a guide to Truth. Quarterly meetings consisting of groups of monthly meetings convened on a regional level. Yearly meetings brought all meetings in a larger area together. The correspondence between the leaders helped to hold the organization together as Friends traveled widely to preach and to visit meetings. They also sent queries to monthly meetings designed to probe how well the groups were following Friends ways.

In the late 1600s, Friends began migrating to England’s North American colonies to avoid persecution. They settled primarily in Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina. The American revolution was a time of great testing for Friends, who suffered for their pacifism. Some Quakers moved northward into what became Canada from the newly born United States. Others left the slave-owning states out of their concern for the abolition of slavery and settled as pioneers in the newly opened Northwest Territories. In the first decades of the nineteenth century more Quakers moved into the west than had come originally to the colonies.

During the 1700s Friends in England and the colonies settled into a period the historians have labeled Quietism. They became more inward-looking and focused on maintaining good order. Discipline
tightened. Friends emphasized the importance of plain speech and dress, moved against those who attended the services of other faiths, and dropped from membership those who violated the code of discipline, including those who married anyone outside the Quaker fold. Elders—Friends charged with nurturing ministry and enforcing rules—would searchingly correct those not in conformity with Friends practices.

**Schism**

Beginning in the 1820s, Quakers in North America underwent a series of schisms that resulted in separate, competing yearly meetings. These schisms had a direct impact on the formation of North Pacific Yearly Meeting.

In 1827 Elias Hicks spoke against new trends arising in Quaker meetings that emphasized personal conversion, the authority of Scripture, salvation through Jesus Christ. Hicks believed the efficacy of the Inner Light was most important, and that true Quakers elevated the Inner Light (continuing personal Divine revelation) above Scripture and church teaching. Those who disagreed with him were called Orthodox Quakers. In 1845, a further separation occurred when followers of Joseph Gurney split away from Orthodox Quakers. The Gurneyites believed in biblical and church authority coupled with the Inner Light. Eventually many Gurneyites moved west and formed new Quaker meetings, including Iowa Yearly Meeting, where Joel Bean and his wife Hannah became important members.

Beginning in the 1850s an intense wave of spiritual revivalism swept the United States. The Revival Movement affected all the Protestant denominations and had a profound influence on many Quaker meetings as well. In 1872 Iowa Yearly Meeting granted official recognition to the underlying theology of revivalism. This meant abandoning silence in worship and de-emphasizing the use of plain dress and speech. First Day Scripture schools were established. Ministers and the authority of church teaching and scripture were emphasized even more. Altars were installed in Quaker places of worship and music was introduced into services. Individuals were now required to be “converted” and then “sanctified” in order to preserve their membership. Attendance to the Inward Light fell into the background.

**Origins of North Pacific Yearly Meeting**

Iowa Yearly Meeting’s official adoption of revivalism distressed many Iowa Quakers. Things came to a head in 1877 when 60 Iowa Friends called for separation. Similar schisms occurred in Western and Kansas Yearly Meetings. Coincidentally, Joel Bean became clerk of Iowa Yearly Meeting in 1877. He and Hannah were already recorded ministers in Iowa Yearly Meeting. Bean was opposed to the changes wrought by revivalism, but he did not believe in separation. Instead he wrote articles in prominent Quaker publications opposing the changes. Ultimately, rather than separate from Iowa Yearly Meeting, the Beans moved to California in 1882. There, they became involved with the San Jose Monthly Meeting which was part of the Honey Creek Quarterly Meeting of Iowa Yearly Meeting.

The San Jose Meeting did not escape the controversies arising from the new revivlistic practices. The Meeting was divided between those, like the Beans, who held to non-revivalist beliefs, and those who espoused them. Eventually Iowa Yearly Meeting dissolved the San Jose Meeting and refused to recognize the College Park Monthly Meeting which the Beans and others established after breaking with the San Jose Meeting. In the midst of this process, Iowa Yearly Meeting withdrew its recording of the Beans as ministers. Undaunted, the Beans inaugurated the College Park Association of Friends in 1889.

*It [the College Park Association of Friends] is not a movement, a new denomination, nor another Yearly Meeting. It is not an official spokesman for the Society of Friends nor any branch of the Society on the Pacific Coast. It is a banding together through mutual interest and concern of all Friends and others in sympathy with Friends’ principles. Each person may become a member upon his own affirmation, and each meeting or group may*
affiliate with the association or not as they may elect. The association does not seek to
commit its members nor the affiliated groups to any set of stated principles or creeds.
Each member is free to make his or her own testimony, and without the stigma of
vacillation, to grow in grace according to his own inner light.

William Lawrence, 1934

The College Park Association allowed Friends to retain membership in their own meetings while
attending at College Park. The goal was to be completely independent from any of the yearly meetings,
each of which was identified with one faction or another within the Society.

The five governing principles of the Association were:

- Belief in the continuing reality of the living Christ, available to all seeking souls;
- Worship of God held in spirit and truth and on the basis of the leadership of the Holy Spirit;
- Freedom of all members and attenders to participate vocally in meetings, under a sense of God’s
  presence;
- The conduct of Friends’ private lives with simplicity and directness, ever sensitive to the world’s
  needs and eager to engage in service;
- Responsibility to the nation, but at the same time, recognition of Friends’ oneness with humanity
  everywhere regardless of race or nation, abstaining from all hatred.

In 1921 Howard Brinton married Anna Cox, a granddaughter of Joel and Hannah Bean. Together, the
young couple carried on the Bean tradition of active involvement in Quakerism. They urged the gathering
together of independent Quaker Meetings on the west coast. By 1930, 30 other independent Quaker
Meetings were established in the Pacific region. Eventually these formed the Pacific Coast Association of
Friends which met annually beginning in 1931. The Association included meetings in California, Oregon,
Washington, and British Columbia. The groups engaged in cooperative projects and supported the
relatively new American Friends Service Committee. Howard Brinton became the first clerk of the group
and the first editor of its publication, Friends Bulletin.

The Meetings of the Pacific Coast Association continued to hold onto their independence, while
reflecting influences from other yearly meetings, including Indiana and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, as
well as Friends Churches. For example, University Friends Meeting began in 1905 as part of Friends
Memorial Meeting within the Puget Sound Quarterly Meeting of Indiana Yearly Meeting.

In 1946 University Friends Meeting, along with others, proposed to establish a new yearly meeting
consisting of west coast Quakers from the Pacific Coast Association of Friends. This new Pacific Yearly
Meeting was Christ-centered and God-centered in orientation. At the same time, Friends noted its
universalist character and confirmed the practice of unprogrammed worship with no recorded ministers.
The standard for membership was readiness and desire to join in the common effort to seek and follow the
Inner Light. There was less emphasis on theology and greater emphasis on peace and social concerns,
such as race relations, arising out of the testimonies.

As Pacific Yearly Meeting grew, it became apparent that the northern part of its area would be better
served by an additional yearly meeting. By 1970, the Pacific Northwest and Willamette Quarterly
Meetings began to explore whether to hold an annual meeting of friends in the Pacific Northwest. At a
1971 joint quarterly meeting at University Friends Meetinghouse, Friends scheduled a North Pacific
Gathering of Friends for the following year.

Of the nine monthly meetings consulted at the Gathering (Corvallis, Eastside, Eugene, Multnomah,
Salem, Tacoma, University, Vancouver, and Victoria), only Victoria did not agree to the formation of
North Pacific Yearly Meeting. Victoria, and two years later, Vancouver, left North Pacific Friends to
throw their lots in with Canadian Yearly Meeting. The remaining monthly meetings approved the
following minute: “This North Pacific Gathering of Friends forms the North Pacific Yearly Meeting as of this date, July 17, 1972.” They also agreed that other meetings could join with NPYM as they were led. All the meetings in the Willamette Quarterly Meeting and Pacific Northwest Quarterly Meeting joined. University Meeting kept dual membership with Pacific and North Pacific Yearly Meeting for a few years.

History of North Pacific Yearly Meeting

Friends of North Pacific Yearly Meeting expressed an early desire to devote their Annual Sessions to seeking the Light, spiritual growth, and discernment of the Yearly Meeting’s corporate voice for the concerns of Friends in the region and the world. To travel less distance and to further this end, they delegated substantial decision-making to a Steering Committee composed of members from constituent monthly meetings. Friends emphasized a desire to keep the structure of the yearly meeting simple and not to establish any standing committees. Over the years, Friends addressed several major areas of concern at their Annual Sessions: corporate witness, same-sex relationships, affiliation with other Quaker organizations, and, in more recent years, changing the structure of the yearly meeting.

Corporate Witness. NPYM Friends have shown the depth of their commitment to Quaker testimonies through their discernment of corporate witness during Annual Sessions. Since it formed, NPYM has approved an impressive array of minutes. These include:

- expressing concern for young men who left the U.S. in conscientious protest against the Vietnam war as well as for those who elected to serve and became prisoners of war in Southeast Asia;
- opposing the building of the Trident submarine and missile project;
- supporting New Zealand Friends for a nuclear free South Pacific;
- opposing the death penalty;
- encouraging the U.S. and the USSR to stop the arms race;
- urging understanding and redress for the injustice done to Japanese Americans during World War II;
- expressing concern for Friends in Great Britain and Argentina about military confrontation over the Falkland Islands;
- urging Friends to inform themselves about Indian Treaty Rights;
- encouraging meetings to consider offering sanctuary to Central American refugees;
- endorsing peace tax fund legislation;
- acknowledging the environmental crisis as a moral and spiritual crisis;
- opposing military and other aid to the Contras in Nicaragua;
- expressing solidarity with native peoples of this hemisphere;
- accepting a challenge to examine ourselves on the issue of racism;
- supporting gay and lesbian civil rights;
- expressing regret to the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for the U.S. bombing of their cities;
- speaking out against the U.S. Army School of the Americas;
- expressing concern about the burning of African American churches in the South;
- opposing a march of the Aryan Nations in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho;
- opposing the bombing and planned invasion of Iraq by the United States, and later, opposing the wars in Iraq;
- recognizing global climate change as an urgent moral and spiritual issue;
- calling for decriminalization of drug use and creating a public health model to achieve reduction of drug abuse;
- condemning the use of torture by our government;
- urging the U.S. to adopt an immigration system that respects the fundamental rights and dignity of all;
- repealing authorization for use of military force.

_Same-sex Relationships._ An area of deep concern over the years has been same-sex relationships. The concern arose as the yearly meeting commenced drafting its own book of *Faith and Practice*. Initially NPYM relied on Pacific Yearly Meeting’s *Faith and Practice*, but in 1979 a committee was formed to revise that *Faith and Practice* to better reflect the life of Quakers in the northwest. The 1982 Annual Session was held at a site where gays and lesbians were asked to remove a sign advertising their meeting. During that Annual Session, Friends affirmed that gay and lesbian Friends were integral to the yearly meeting and decided that NPYM could not meet at a location that restricted or rejected any of its members.

In 1986, the Committee on the Discipline presented a draft of the new NPYM *Faith and Practice* at Annual Session. After laboring, NPYM accepted it as a “living, evolving document”, but could not reach unity on the question whether marriage was defined as between two persons, or between a man and a woman. Monthly meetings throughout the yearly meeting then took up the issue but Friends could not yet come to unity on appropriate language. At the 1990 Annual Session, the yearly meeting again took up the question. This time, Friends directed the Committee on the Discipline to change the language defining marriage as between a man and a woman and to revise the chapter to reflect the discernment of Friends.

Separate from the yearly meeting’s revision of *Faith and Practice*, an NPYM minute in 1992 affirmed Friends’ belief that “the Spirit of God is present in all loving relationships regardless of the genders of those involved” and “endorsed efforts to protect the civil rights of all persons regardless of their sexual orientation.”

Then, in 1993, the Steering Committee approved the revised *Faith and Practice* definition of a committed relationship or marriage as between a “couple”, while noting that some monthly meetings only “find clearness to oversee heterosexual relationships.”

NPYM continued the work of understanding the lives of gay and lesbian Friends. In 1997, NPYM approved a minute supporting the legal recognition of same-sex marriages, while noting that “most of the meetings in the NPYM have felt called to take the marriages of gay couples and lesbian couples under their care.” In 2004, NPYM approved a further minute opposing “all attempts to deny legal recognition of marriage of same-sex couples.”

_Structural Change._ In the formation of the yearly meeting, most substantial decisions were delegated to a Steering Committee in order to preserve Annual Sessions for spiritual growth fellowship, and social witness. As the yearly meeting grew in size, the Steering Committee structure became increasingly unwieldy and felt remote from local groups. In 1992, NPYM formed an ad hoc Mulling Committee to answer the query, “What is the role and function of yearly meeting?” The following year, Annual Session devoted time to hearing from Friends answers to this query. In its discernment, NPYM approved several proposals: to amend *Faith and Practice* to show that the yearly meeting’s central concern would now be the support and encouragement of monthly meetings, worship groups, and individual Friends; to relieve the Steering Committee of the task of planning and carrying out Annual Session by creating a Planning
Committee; to assign to that committee the task of deepening fellowship and a sense of spirit at the Annual Session; and, to fund a part-time, paid yearly meeting secretary.

NPYM continued the process of discerning its proper structure, especially as it related to the role of the Steering Committee. Over the years, NPYM had grown to include over 50 monthly meetings, preparative meetings, and worship groups. In 2003, the presiding clerk called attention to the growing complexity of yearly meeting responsibilities, finances, and affiliations. He pointed out the growing difficulty of filling the positions required to carry out the work of NPYM, as well as the lack of interest among monthly meetings in the issues taken up by the Steering Committee.

Over the next several years, an ad hoc Vision and Structure Committee worked to develop a way forward for the yearly meeting. In 2007, Annual Session approved the committee’s proposal that most of the yearly meeting’s business be conducted during the Annual Session, rather than in Steering Committee meetings. The Steering Committee would be replaced by a Coordinating Committee composed of members from the monthly meetings. There would be three new Standing Committees: Ministry and Oversight, Peace and Social Concerns, and Programming for Youth. NPYM gradually implemented these changes. The Coordinating Committee started its work in 2009.

Affiliation with Other Quaker Organizations. Although initially reluctant to over involve itself with larger Quaker organizations, in 1974, NPYM agreed to join with Friends World Committee for Consultation and the American Friends Service Committee. Both FWCC and the AFSC have remained important to the yearly meeting. NPYM designates representatives to both organizations, provides travel and other support for its representatives, and has heard reports from those groups at most Annual Sessions. In 1978, NPYM affiliated with Friends Committee on National Legislation, and subsequently, with Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (now Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns) offering similar support to those organizations. NPYM also has maintained consistent support for Friends Peace Teams. Most recently, NPYM agreed to affiliate with Quaker Earthcare Witness.

Over the years since its inception, NPYM has recurringly engaged in discernment over whether to affiliate with Friends General Conference. FGC is a Quaker organization, regarded as originating from the Hicksite branch of Quakers. FGC is affiliated with 12 yearly meetings, a few of which include pastoral meetings. FGC offers educational materials and spiritual nurturing programs and hosts an annual Gathering which a number of NPYM Friends attend.

FGC first invited NPYM to affiliate in 1981. After considering the invitation, NPYM found there was little interest in affiliating. In 1997, NPYM again studied the question; the Steering Committee concluded that no formal relationship was possible at the time, but that the seasoning process should continue:

“We have learned that some Friends among us have attended FGC gatherings or have other FGC experience which makes them treasure the organization and gives them a strong incentive to have North Pacific Yearly Meeting join. Others cherish our Yearly Meeting’s independent, non-aligned status and wish to maintain it. Some Friends hope to move towards a more inclusive Society of Friends and do not wish to affiliate with a liberal Friends organization such as Friends General Conference unless we are also willing to affiliate with Friends United Meeting. Still others are concerned about the practical reasons to join or not join FGC. Steering Committee feels led to continue the seasoning process, hoping that, no matter what the outcome, we will all learn more about each other and about other Friends organizations as we seek Divine Guidance for us in this matter.”

In 2006, FGC held its Annual Gathering in the state of Washington. Many NPYM Quakers attended and helped put on the Gathering. Subsequent to that Gathering, NPYM again engaged in discerning whether to affiliate. The Coordinating Committee formed an ad hoc committee to further study the issue. NPYM addressed the ad hoc committee’s recommendation to affiliate at Annual Sessions over the next
several years. Friends could not come to unity on affiliation, stating some of the same reasons that existed in 1997. At the Annual Session in 2012, Friends decided to re-examine the nature of affiliations and ties with other Quaker organizations. The ad hoc committee was asked to consider whether closer ties could be established between FGC and NPYM.

Several monthly meetings within NPYM have considered direct affiliation with FGC and Olympia Monthly Meeting is a member.