Multnomah Meeting group discussion
of the Draft Chapter on Monthly Meeting
prepared by the Committee on the Discipline for review

There were four Friends present. Our comments come from notes reviewed and revised by all of us before forwarding.

Wordiness: In general, parts of this section seem wordy and should be condensed, simplified and possibly improved graphically by the use of sidebars or boxes (see below). In particular we thought the sections of pages 3-5 needs re-organizing, and could be condensed and simplified. It is too long and meandering. It never uses the phrases "standing aside" or "standing in the way" anywhere, yet these are important concepts and phrases frequently used. They need to be named and explained, and much earlier in the discussion.

Attenders: At the bottom of page 3, what are "interested attenders" (as opposed to UNinterested attenders?) It was felt that unless there were legal ramifications or the decision was unusually significant, attenders should be fully involved in the decision. "Generally encouraged to attend" business meeting is strange. Under what circumstances would folks NOT be encouraged to attend?

Audience: In general, we had an overriding question about audience. For whom is F&P intended? Many audiences: Newcomers as a written introduction, those seeking a reference guide of manual, those simply trying to find words that describe us. Awareness of the needs of audiences should be a constant in the writing.

Minutes: On page 4 and 5, there is no need to go into the entire process of creating minutes. (Note that several paragraphs are very long) It should be explained that most minutes are fairly mundane. Although some do require the lengthy approval process described here, those are the minority, the more complex or controversial ones.

Boxes and sidebars: One suggestion was to use boxes or "sidebars" for supportive material or readily used, specific information. They can be grayed in the background. Numerous techniques have been developed to pull out "stand-alone" information. The example of "Clearness Committee" was given. The idea is to make the information more readily accessible.

Clearness committees: It should be noted that clearness committees can have different purposes. Some deal with personal issues not related to the meeting per se, some are "communal" and address an individual's relationship with the meeting itself. The difference between a clearness committee and support committee should be noted. Note that some meetings (our Meeting for example) call "care" committees "support" committees. Descriptions of our Clearness and Support committees were sent to you shortly after Annual Session.

Inclusive language: At the very beginning of F&P there needs to be an explanation of the language Friends use for that power that is central to the Quaker Way. We are drawn to different words, but in the silence beyond words we all experience it. Some call it God, some The Spirit, some the Divine, some the Light. Although we use different names (because of our different experiences and upbringings), we know the ineffable that is behind and beyond mere words.) Having embraced all the terms used, F&P, for the sake of convenience should decide on one, realizing it may not be the first choice of all, but also knowing that Friends understand and accept the inadequacy of language. We also know that language, for all its shortcomings, is essential to the human experience. Likewise, the importance of the life and
teachings of Jesus and of Christianity to Quakers. Again, differences among Friends should be explained in an inclusive way. When it comes to theological belief, the caution is "you have talked to only ONE Friend"? We find great spiritual strength in our open differences and willingness to share our diverse spiritual experiences. We are united by the divine spirit in all of its manifestations. One idea is to include an explanation of the use of language in a “preface” to F&P, explain the choice of word, give a long list of possible interpretations, and then use the one agreed word.

The role of clerk: We felt the description of the job of Clerk lacked recognition of the spiritual depth and awareness needed. We took real exception to the statement: "The Clerk's basic function is to facilitate the business of the Meeting." The Clerk is called to attend to and maintain a strong spiritual center in the meeting. The clerk is attentive to the guidance of the spirit in all aspects of the life of the meeting. The clerk is called upon to speak on behalf of the meeting to the broader public. The clerk should take care to refer pastoral matters to the oversight committee. In an emergency (fire, earthquake etc), the clerk is the central point of contact. Because of the clerk's weight of responsibility, many have support committees (is this the same as a "care" committee?)

Organizing by functions, not positions (or both): The section on Assistant Clerk, Recording Clerk and Corresponding Clerk needs to be expanded. At MM M, the duties of the "recorder" have been divided between the assistant clerk and the archivist. In short, we have no "recorder." In light of this observation, we note that instead of organizing the section by position, we suggest that it might be organized by function. (or organize by both, in order to serve two or three different audiences). Someone considering becoming treasurer would logically want to see all the treasurer's responsibilities in one place. But someone who wants to know where to go to find out about renting space wants to go to Property Management or rentals and wouldn't likely think of going to "hearthkeeper."

Aging and long-term illness: Some mention about aging and long-term illness is needed. could be included in the section on pastoral care of members.

Why 'monthly' meeting?: Because part of the readership is newcomers, we should explain the historical origin of "monthly meeting." Some meetings still use "monthly meeting" as part of their public name, which, in my view, is confusing despite its has historical validity. The problem is that newcomers don't know the history behind the name.....F&P should help them understand it.
November 17

I've read through most of these proposed changes, and on the whole, I'm not entirely convinced that most of the additions are necessary. Reorganization of paragraphs, moving quotes to different sections, sure. However, particularly after reading the last part about Children's Program, it seems like the over specific input of overly worried individuals without specific discernment over specific suggestions or principles. Good examples in there are inviting young friends to participate in intergenerational activities including worship sharing. Less necessary is almost the entire paragraph p. 18 "It is no easy task..." This information presented there seems to me more relevant to those who have a concern about how to engage young people in general, and does not reflect something relevant to NPYM's faith or practice. There is always a risk of being overprescriptive, or problematizing adolescent's behavior or experience as something to be "fixed", rather than experiential learning we all go through.

The section on Friends in Ministry, as noted by the commentary, needs more actual discussion and discernment among NPYM Friends before we enshrine words in Faith and Practice. Seeing as these conversations are only now disseminating in a compelling, open way to the whole Meeting, this will need more time to season before any additions.

My main concern, is at what point do we become overly legalistic and procedural in this document, instead of providing a guiding framework of practice, and an illumination of the central tenets and diversity of beliefs? Or, when do we incorporate discerned words from Friends, but hold back on individual concerns and pet issues that amount to unnecessary verbiage in this document?

In that spirit, please feel free to take or leave these comments, and if there are any clarifying questions, please feel free.

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October 15

Friends

I find the early part of the text overly homage-paying to the early Friends in name. Neither George Fox nor the "Valiant Sixty" are crucial to an understanding of the principles of communication or coordination. "It depended chiefly upon..." could greatly benefit from a specific noun as the subject, rather than the pronoun "it" due to its isolation from any antecedent. Also, the sentence "Fox recognized that..." seems to contradict itself because "Fox" is the subject who recognized that a method had to be found to spread responsibility among a large number of Friends.

The following paragraph: "Being aware of the hypocrisy and worldliness of the religious hierarchies and institutions of his day, Fox was led to proclaim the “true Gospel Order,” an order of which Christ was clearly the head arid in which all Friends participated fully according to the measure of Light they had received." is incredibly stilted. I don't worship George Fox just as I do not worship Jesus. I worship in accordance with that which Fox and Christ taught while on earth. Also, what on earth does "the head arid in which..." mean? I find it equally necessary to understand what Fox said/did as I do to understand that which Christ said/did. I also don't see why it's essential to understand the life and times of George Fox in order to understand the import of the monthly meeting. What some guy wearing leather pants (bloody cool though he be) did in the 1600's has little bearing on how I view the people and structure
where I spend time on a weekly basis. I disagree with the history lesson here contained in Faith and Practice as being irrelevant. We ought not put seekers off with arcane details.

I also think the following paragraph varnishes the truth of the culture in the 1600's. I find it difficult to believe that Fox arrived at the inequity of the societal dealings with gender without any help from female Friends such as Margaret Fell. I find it more convincing that female Friends persuaded Fox and other early Friends that the system was oppressing them and that it needed to change.

Furthermore, to suggest that the import of the monthly meeting was established by Fox and has remained essentially unchanged in the ensuing 350 years is self-evidently disingenuous.

Meeting for Worship:

I will end my commentary here because Faith and Practice is clearly out of touch with reality here. "The Meeting for Worship is the heart of the Monthly Meeting and of the Society of Friends, for worship together is central and fundamental to Friends. Its basis is direct communion with God. The Meeting for Worship is the only Quaker practice which has existed from the beginning of the Society of Friends and which remains essentially the same without having gone through a process of development." The vast majority of members in the "Society of Friends" now worship with a programmed tradition with a pastor which is the furthest thing from what Fox advocated. This passage is clearly out of touch with reality. At this point I find it necessary to completely rewrite Faith and Practice or for me to stand aside and as I have NO intention of seeing the unprogrammed tradition of NPYM changed, I will stand aside.

October 30

Nominating Committee has looked at the draft, overall, as well as our specific areas. We quite like the reorganization of certain material and the additional subheadings for clarity. They help! We have a few comments below, none of which are truly substantive.

* In p 7, paragraph starting "Ministry in word..." there is a reference to the "nomination process described below." Because the Nominating process is not for several pages, I suggest a cross reference to the nominating process on page ____ under, "Nominating Committee."

* Same paragraph as above- I would end the last sentence so that it reads: "A good officer is one who, while assuming a particular responsibility, is committed to the leading of the Spirit in discerning what needs to be done and who seeks to engage others in the meeting." The omitted phase seems to be beyond the description of a good officer.

* In page 14, #6, there was an addition about Nominating considering the "gifts and talents of younger members and attenders (high school and college age) and of newly-participating adults." I support that and would like to see it included.

* Under "Other Committees" on page 14, it is asked whether Faith and Practice should include descriptions of other typical committees and their responsibilities. I think a brief sentence on the typical committees could be nice. I think it might also be helpful to point out those newer committee which we have added, like Communications Committee and Young Adult Friends. It seems like these are particularly helpful when a Meeting gets to a larger size.

October 15

In looking over the proposed revisions, I concluded that they are pretty much cosmetic cleanup
maneuvers rather than substantive changes to anything. Don't hesitate to correct me on this; it was
based on a quick perusal only. I do believe that we could contribute a more detailed update to the job
description(s) of treasurer/assistant treasurer, especially since those positions are so vital to our function
here as a larger, more active meeting than most.

August 26

I noted the question in our draft F&P about standing aside. Here is a bit from New England YM on this.


You might also want to google their draft F&P for more details on this and other topics.

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Comments from an individual on NPYM F&P Monthly Meetings section

Wd: wording unclear; Sb: substantive concern; Cm” general comment.

Wd p.2 3rd paragraph, beginning “Being aware...”: end of line 2: the word “arid” clearly should be “and.”
Sb p.3 “responsibility for decisions remains with members of the meeting” What does this mean, exactly? It sounds as
though attenders do not have the same rights as members, even though it is written to refer to responsibilities rather
than rights. It sounds exclusive. I see that this is in the current version, too, though.

Wd p. 4 Under Good Order of Friends..., ¶ 2: “..they should be hesitant about speaking more than once unless
they have new light on an issue” change to “..they should be hesitant about speaking more than once on an issue
unless they have new light on it.” The current wording implies that a Friend should speak only once in the entire
business meeting.

Wd p. 4 Under Role of the Clerk “If that view is being overlooked...” change to “If the Clerk discerns that his or
her own view is being overlooked...”. The word “that” is ambiguous here. (What view?)

Sb pp. 3-? This entire section needs some work. The processes of “standing aside” and “standing in the way” are
not described or named.

Wd p. 5 Under Serious Differences of Opinion, ¶ 2, last sentence: “..may need the counsel of Friends as to
whether...” The correct wording is “about whether”.

Wd pp. 5-6 This sentence would be better worded “...must resist the temptation to repeat the work of the
committee, and the committee, on its part, must avoid...”

Sb p. 7 Agree that some additional material on supporting leaders would be helpful. Also, yes, I like the new
introductory paragraph on Officers.

Wd p. 7 Last sentence in paragraph beginning “The Clerk presides...” (sentence about correspondence) should be
moved to previous paragraph. It is out of place where it is.

Sb pp. 8-9 More detail is needed in the description of Recording Clerk and Corresponding Clerk. These roles are
unclear here.
Comments on NPYM F&P Monthly Meetings section

Wd: wording unclear; Sb: substantive concern; Cm” general comment.

Wd p. 9 Under Recorder, first sentence. “membership” should be changed to “all members.” Records of the membership would refer to statistical information about the membership of the Meeting as a whole (e.g., how many joined / left during the current year, how many belong to worship groups under the Meeting’s care, etc.). Also, this position might also be described as “Archivist” (Recorder / Archivist), and “typewritten” should be revised to “typewritten or electronically printed.”

Cm p. 9 I like the new introduction to Committees.

Cm p. 10 Comment on committee name: Some meetings have given up the word “oversight” because of the historical use of the word “overseer” during slavery times. Might we consider this, replacing it with some other word (e.g., counsel)?

Wd p. 11 Typo: second to last paragraph, sentence 2: “at tenders” should be “attenders.” Also, “activities which will deepen” should be “activities that will deepen.”

Sb p. 12 Top of page: the two sentences “Persons are sometimes drawn...” and “A Meeting needs to be careful...” do not belong here, but should be somewhere else, in a section or paragraph dealing with that issue.

Wd p. 12 In paragraph near bottom of page, beginning “In dealing with...”, penultimate paragraph has an extraneous period after the word “standing.”

Sb p.12 I like the suggestions about new material.

Sb p. 13 I agree that more detail should be added about clearness committees.

Sb p.14 (top of page) I agree with the addition of #6, and with the suggestion of listing other typical committees.

Wd p. 14 typo: under “Liberated or Released Friends...” first sentence, line 2, has unnecessary hyphen between “which” and “cannot.”

Wd p. 18 typo: penultimate paragraph, about halfway through: sentence beginning “When younger and older...” the word “they” following “mentors that” should be “the.” Also, unnecessary closing quotation mark at the end of the sentence following that (or perhaps a missing opening one?).

Sb (general) How about a section on aging, and/or on facing illness and death? (Maybe mention under “pastoral care of members”)