NPYM Committee on the Discipline

Questions for Local Friends Groups
on THE MONTHLY MEETING

The chapter on The Monthly Meeting in our book of Faith and Practice is long and complex. The Committee on the Discipline suggests some reordering for a better flow; still, requests and suggestions that the Committee has received from NPYM Friends over the past few years tend to make the chapter even longer and more complex. The complete draft text is in a companion document. An outline of the draft revision appears below, followed by questions to stimulate discussion about this material.

Because this is such a long chapter, local Friends groups may choose to discuss it in parts. Groups may divide the material for discussion in any way they choose, depending on the time available. Here are two suggestions for dividing up the material for ease of discussion:

If three sessions: look at Outline sections 1-4 (with Questions for Discussion 1-5) in Session 1, Outline section 5 (Questions 6-10) in Session 2, Outline sections 6-7 (Questions 11-18) in Session 3.

If two sessions: look at Outline sections 1-5 (with Questions for Discussion 1-10) in Session 1, Outline sections 6-7 (Questions 11-18) in Session 2.

The Committee on the Discipline will be grateful for all input from local friends groups so that this chapter can faithfully reflect the diversity of practices within NPYM at this time.

Proposed Outline for the Chapter on the Monthly Meeting
(page #s refer to the 1993 edition of NPYM Faith and Practice; proposed new material shown in italics)

1. Introduction
   "The monthly meeting is the fundamental unit..." [69]
   2 paragraphs now under Responsibilities and Organization [74]
   Add: cross-reference to Quarterly and Yearly Meetings

2. Background
   Quotation(s) from George Fox about establishing monthly meetings [69, 70]
   Historical description [69, 70]

3. Meeting for Worship
   [Quotations have been moved elsewhere]
   Add: cross-reference to the Worship section in the spiritual disciplines chapter
   1 brief paragraph of description [72-73]

4. Meeting for Business
   John Woolman quotation [73]
   Add: cross ref to the Discernment section in the spiritual disciplines chapter
   a. Friends’ Method of Reaching Decisions [74-76] with subheadings added:
      i. Bringing Items of Business Before the Meeting
      ii. Good Order of Friends during Meeting for Business
      iii. Role of the Clerk
      iv. Sense of the Meeting
      v. Adjourned Meetings and Called Meetings [currently in Formulation…77]
   b. Formulation of Minutes [77]
   c. Unity [78]
   d. Serious Differences of Opinion [76-77]
   e. Threshing Sessions [77-78]
f. State of the Society Report [88]

5. Meeting Officers and Committees [80-81]
   Add: mention of insurance, legal incorporation
   a. Officers [81-83]
      Add: intro paragraph to acknowledge wide range within NPYM
      Add: support for Friends in leadership roles
         i. Clerk
         ii. Assistant Clerk, Recording Clerk, Corresponding Clerk
         iii. Treasurer; Assistant Treasurer
         iv. Recorder
   b. Committees [83-89]
      i. Introductory paragraphs
      ii. Committee on Worship & Ministry; Committee on Oversight
         1. Concern for Worship & Ministry
         2. Concern for Oversight
            a. Pastoral Care of Members
            b. Add: Special Challenges in Oversight and Pastoral Care
            c. Clearness Committees
            d. Add: Care Committees
         3. Joint Responsibilities
            iii. Nominating Committee
            iv. Other Committees
   6. Friends in Ministry (was called Concerns and Liberating Concerned Friends [78-80])
      a. Add: Oversight, Accountability, and Support for Friends in the Ministry
      b. Liberated or Released Friends with a Concern
      c. Add: Recorded Ministers
      d. Add: Friends in Ministry Work
      e. Add: Support Committees
      f. Traveling Minutes [80]
      g. Letters of Introduction [80]
   7. Add: Children and Youth in Local Meetings
      a. First Day School [currently there is one sentence on p. 81]
      b. Add: Children’s Safety
         Possible new language borrowed from Intermountain Yearly Meeting
         Children
         Youth

Some questions for discussion around “The Monthly Meeting” in NPYM’s Faith & Practice

From NPYM Friends and the Committee on the Discipline

1. What is your group’s practice around formulation of minutes? What kinds of decisions are recorded as full formal minutes? Do you approve the wording of a formal minute during the meeting the topic is being discussed or at a subsequent Meeting for Business?

2. What is your group’s practice and experience around handling serious difference of opinion? Should the section in Faith and Practice give more detail about “standing aside” and “standing in the way”?
3. What is your group’s practice and experience with “threshing”? Is the description here adequate? If not, what should be added?

4. The section on Meeting officers and committees could be augmented with specific examples of the different ways Friends within NPYM organize themselves. What offices and committees does your group currently have?

5. It has been suggested that Faith and Practice include material about support for Friends in leadership roles – for example, advice to Friends to stay tender toward those who are in leadership positions, and encouragement to accept leadership in faith and without fear. What would be helpful in a paragraph about Quaker leadership?

6. “Committee on Worship and Ministry” and “Committee on Oversight” are the names most often used in this chapter. “Ministry and Oversight Committee” is used for a committee combining the functions. What is your preferred name for the committee(s) carrying out these functions?

7. New material will be added about in a section called Special Challenges in Oversight and Pastoral Care, to include:
   - Anti-harassment policies
   - Members & attenders with criminal history, especially as sex offenders
   - Members & attenders who tend to be cast out from the wider society
   - Members & attenders with mental illness

   What is your group’s experience with handling these and similar challenges? Do you have guidelines, procedures, policies you could share?

8. Is the description of Clearness Committees (with its footnote) adequate, or should our *Faith and Practice* include more detail on how they work, such as the tradition that Clearness Committee members ask open questions and listen, but refrain from giving specific advice?

9. What is your group’s practice and experience with Care Committees?

10. *Faith and Practice* currently includes full descriptions of the Worship and Ministry, Oversight, and Nominating Committees. Should it include descriptions of other typical committees and their responsibilities and functions?

11. Our Faith and Practice does not currently include a working definition of “ministry.” How would you define it?

12. What is your group’s practice and experience with Friends in Ministry Work—for instance, do you provide ‘denominational endorsement’ for a hospital chaplain, perhaps using a clearness process?

13. The Committee on the Discipline has heard from Friends that our Faith and Practice should include more material about support for Friends in ministry work such as chaplaincy, counseling, and spiritual direction. The Committee now senses a tension arising: we want to acknowledge and support members doing “ministry work” in their professional lives but we do not acknowledge and support members doing “ministry work” within our meetings and within the Society. It’s not within the Committee’s scope to suggest changes in NPYM practice; it is within our scope to point out possible inconsistencies and encourage discussion. What do you think?

14. What is your group’s practice and experience with Support Committees?
15. The current PYM *Faith and Practice* includes a few sentences concerning children, incorporated into Committee on Worship & Ministry/Committee on Oversight descriptions. Friends have identified several topics to be added to NPYM’s *Faith and Practice*, including
- First Day School - with cross-ref to “religious education and study” in the “Faith” part of the book. Might include: First Day School Committee is not just for parents! Curriculum, activities, and projects to reflect our wide range of faith and practice
- Children’s Safety to include: care for physical safety; recommendation to have 2 adults in supervision, not just 1; Friends and mandatory reporting
- Transition to Adulthood - with cross-ref to chapter on membership. Might include: care for young people is for the whole Meeting, not just one committee; recognition of milestones such as HS graduation; nurturing spiritual gifts and spiritual contributions of young people; encouraging participation in meeting for worship

The Committee on the Discipline also suggests borrowing and adapting some material from Intermountain Yearly Meeting’s *Faith and Practice*, pp. 91-95. This material is included in the draft chapter for NPYM review. Is it suitable? Is there anything that NPYM Friends would add, subtract, alter?

16. What’s missing from this material that you find central to the right ordering of a Monthly Meeting?

17. Are there parts of this section that you think would belong better in some other part of the *Faith & Practice*? Parts that you think could be deleted?

18. What books, pamphlets, articles, or other resources can you recommend about the right ordering of a Monthly Meeting?