

2024 Ministry and Counsel Report to IYMC

The Ministry and Counsel Committee has met monthly from September through April and weekly in June and July, attended by those who are able. We gather to worship, to share the concerns of our meetings, and to be available to provide care; hoping to help foster the spiritual life and good order of the yearly meeting and monthly meetings.

The Committee is to consist of two representatives appointed from each monthly meeting. We note with sadness that one monthly meeting has no representative and several meetings have only one. We wonder how that affects the spiritual life and good order of the yearly meeting and monthly meetings.

Pre-pandemic (2020) the Committee met daily during yearly meeting sessions, and perhaps once during the year. This year all of our meetings, and work, have occurred virtually throughout the year. We recognize that this is a change in how the committee, and the YM, does our work. “How we’ve always done it” no longer applies, and we no longer follow the practices outlined in our Faith and Practice.

We have read the State of the Meeting reports and forward them to the Clerk to be read in session.

We note the vibrancy of some meetings; we appreciate the use of technology which allows wider participation in meetings, yet have a concern for a lack of rooted members providing the care of our meetinghouses, especially as our meetings report aging members and transitory newcomers. Our hearts are broken by the laying down of Omaha Meeting, the survival struggle of other small meetings, and the loss of dear Friends Beth Wilson and Judy Plank.

We continue to hold the possibility of revising the Queries and wonder how the Yearly Meeting would like to proceed.

“Safety and Protection of Children & Youth at Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions, Midyear Meeting, and Other Functions”

For the past 10 years the Ministry and Counsel Committee has shepherded an ad-hoc committee concerned with safety of children in yearly meeting. A summary of their work is in the 2018 M&C report to YM. The fruit of the work was a draft document which the M&C Committee presented to the yearly meeting in 2020. This led to lengthy discussion and a stated commitment to continue to “wrestle with these issues so that we can create guidelines that fit the circumstances of OUR yearly meeting.” The Ad-hoc Committee—which was now the Ad Hoc Child Safety Revision Committee—followed-up with seeking feedback from monthly meetings and in virtual listening sessions. The input led to a rewrite of the document into three separate documents for different audiences/uses. Drafts and outlines of these documents were available at the 2023 YM Session. This year the Ad Hoc committee completed its review and incorporation of feedback from meetings and presented the completed revised and expanded

draft. The ad hoc committee has done its best to be faithful to the leadings of the Spirit while considering all of the detailed feedback and comments received and the committee asked to be released. We appreciate the work of ad-hoc committee. The Ministry and Counsel Committee believes that our leading to undertake this work has been accomplished. The completed document, which continues to be labeled “draft” as it is a living document, has been shared with the Junior Yearly Meeting and Young Friends Committees with the expectation that they will use and update it. These committees have been using the guidelines. We hope they will distribute or publish the document as appropriate and continue to revise it to reflect their practice.

While conflict is natural, we know that sometimes Friends are at a loss for how to respond to it, especially when feelings are hurt and some may not feel safe. Biblical counsel and an explanation of the ways that Quakers have historically responded to conflict within monthly meetings was shared with a monthly meeting that reached out to M&C for support.

The Spiritual Sharing Small Groups are in their fourth year. Participating friends make a six-month commitment to their small group. Every six months there is a “shuffle” when new groups are formed. We expect the next shuffle in September. Friends have expressed appreciation for how their experience has deepened connections and creates a safe place to share how God is working in each person's life.

We hold a concern for ministry in our meetings: how do we encourage ministry and bring those who minister under the care of the meeting? We hope to encourage monthly meetings to support those called to minister.

The Ministry and Counsel Committee is planning a retreat for the committee in the coming year. We ask the Yearly Meeting to help fund this event, if necessary, so that all committee members can participate regardless of their contribution of time and/or money.

We received Religious Education reports from [5] meetings and recommend that they be printed in the MinuteBook.

The Ministry and Counsel clerk for the coming year will be named during our next meeting scheduled for August 25.

Submitted by
Cheryl Sutton and Lorene Ludy, co-clerks