

Herndon Meeting: Faith and Practice Discussion

November 4, 2012

From the Committee: Jim Rose

Recorder: Susan Hills Rose

The Herndon meeting sent us written comments prior to the meeting (attached).

Overall

We heard from a Friend who described the book as “fabulous” but thought it would be helpful to have more examples. For example, it would be helpful to illustrate the relationship between monthly meetings and BYM, showing how monthly meetings can bring forward minutes for possible adoption.

Education/Family Life

A Friend suggested consulting *Paths for Quaker Parenting*, issued by the Quaker Parenting Initiative, for examples of how children can be nurtured.

Voices

We heard that Friends appreciated the many voices and felt they enriched the book.

A Friend said there were many voices he did not recognize, and he would have liked a bibliography. Jim pointed out the reference section and he felt that was sufficient to help him learn more about authors.

Memorial Meetings

We heard that Friends would have liked more specific guidance on memorial meetings. They understood the value of the checklist, which includes many meetings, but would have liked unique features of memorial meetings addressed in more detail (similar to meetings for marriage). Note that we already point to the checklist in the discussion of memorial meetings on page 39.

Marriage

One Friend was surprised that there was little discussion of same sex marriage. Jim pointed out the references that do exist and Friends felt they were sufficient.

A Friend noted the reference to marriages that conform to civil law (p. 192) and wondered if there was any instance other than same sex marriage that might be an exception. A Friend recalled that a Friend married her partner without a civil ceremony in order to keep existing financial and inheritance arrangements. However, the couple wanted to be married in the eyes of the meeting. Interracial marriages were not recognized in Virginia until 1967. A Friend raised the issue of how a meeting might handle a request from a couple that wanted to be married but was not legally divorced. Jim noted that the guidance cannot anticipate everything; each meeting may encounter situations that require struggle.

History of BYM

Friends pointed out a number of statements that could be clarified in this section (see attached). They were unaware of the separate volume on the history of BYM and asked that it be referenced more clearly in this section (see this book...). They also hoped it would be updated. Friends felt the history section was about the right length.

Struggles of the Faith and Practice Committee

A Friend asked what the committee had found to be the most difficult. Jim pointed to the challenge of keeping a balance around Christocentric vs. more general language and the inclusion of Biblical quotations. The section on healing the meeting also had a long birth process.

Laying Down a Meeting

We heard that it was not clear when and how the Yearly Meeting can lay down a meeting. It was also disturbing to one member that the Yearly Meeting could take over a monthly meeting's assets. He pointed out that purchasing the building for Herndon meeting represented financial commitments on the part of members, and if the meeting were laid down he thought members should benefit from any sale of property. The issue of ownership should be clarified. We noted that BYM is different from Indiana YM, which is more a "top down" organizational structure.

Support Committees

Friends discussed the distinctions in different types of leadings. They noted that in one instance in which a friend had a leading to address the problem of plastic bags and the environment, it went through the social concerns committee and there was no need for a separate support committee. This type of path for a leading should also be spelled out.

The meeting uses the term "care committee" for the type of committee in which practical or physical concerns of a member are addressed. This term may be common to other meetings as well and should be introduced. The meeting has a minute regarding care committees they would be happy to share.

Glossary

We heard that Friends liked and appreciated the glossary.

Recording Membership

Friends were very concerned that the current discussion of how Friends can be removed from membership (page 139) gave the impression that Friends could be removed from membership rolls without discussion. If the intention is to get in touch with the individual and discuss whether or not the membership is meaningful to them, this should be much clearer. They felt a Friend should be considered

a member as long as he or she finds the membership meaningful, regardless of whether the individual is nearby or attends meeting regularly. Some people who grew up in the meeting may take a number of years to decide their religious affiliation for themselves, and during that period the monthly meeting should retain them as members. The process of deciding on the best course should be an interactive, two-way listening process, never an arbitrary decision. It might be helpful to be in touch with a 25-year-old who grew up in the meeting and inquire with interest about the person's spiritual path and home.

Finance Committees

A Friend wanted to be sure that the need for audits of financial records was mentioned. We used the index to find references and the Friend felt they were adequate.

Attachment

A few collated comments/suggestions on the BYM Faith and Practice 2012 First Reading – from some members of the Herndon Friends Meeting Ministry and Oversight Committee

Our only substantive question is in regard to page 138 - membership for minors. It is a change from the previous F&P that they cannot be full members. We are wondering why that cannot be left to individual monthly meetings to decide.

Pg 12- 13 There is discussion of compensation of Native Americans, and the role of Quakers during the Civil War and Reconstruction, but little mention about the critical leadership role Quakers played in industry and commerce, especially in the 1700 and 1800's. Seems a magnification of some roles and shrinkage of others that does not reflect history in an even manner. That said, I recognize that the coverage of all topics is necessarily very brief in order to keep the volume at a readable length.

Page 12. This seems to imply that NoVA meetings were not founded until the late 1770's

Pg 14 Quote - "As a result of westward movement, BYM set off Ohio Yearly Meeting in 1812..." am assuming "set off" means released to become their own yearly meeting, but this is not clear. Readers may not understand the language.

Page 14. What happened to Virginia Yearly Meeting?

Pg 16-18 The text dedicates almost 2 pages to quoting the "Statement on Spiritual Unity" from 1964 as a follow up to the discussion of the Hicksite (and other) splits. The chapter ends with the implied message that all stands as it did coming out of the 1964 Statement. I strongly recommend that BYM consider adding a sentence in the last paragraph discussing the "consolidated BYM" to the effect that tensions among the various branches and traditions of Friends remain an active dynamic to the present day - a dynamic which Friends work in an on-going effort to listen, understand, and seek unity in the Spirit. I think it would be disingenuous to ignore the reality of now and think that it can be addressed briefly in a sincere manner.

Page 19. "seekers who ground their search in love are welcome in our Meetings" – nice! We are open but not total pushovers.

Page 43 The paragraph of drugs and alcohol seems to be awkwardly placed. Perhaps simply changing the section heading from "Fixing the World" to something else would solve the dilemma of where to put that mention. Perhaps "Evolving Testimonies?"

Would it be helpful to include a little more information about other branches of Quakerism, in order to promote understanding of them?

P 176-190 The first part of the section on Clearness Committees and also Support Committees seems to be new material. I liked the distinction drawn between the two types - that a Clearness Committee is often related to a personal decision whereas a Support Committee is more like a Care Committee to help a Friend through something. Actually I wondered if we should change the name of our Care Committee to Support Committee? I like the idea of there being ad-hoc Support Committees formed for Friends going through difficult times.

I had trouble really understanding the Clearness Committee on whether to follow leadings (181-2) and the Support Committee on how to follow a leading (186-7). Some more concrete examples of what they mean by "a leading" might be useful. I am not able to see exactly how this type of Clearness Committee is different than one for a personal decision, or, more broadly, why the distinction is necessary at all. I would find it simpler to just say there are Clearness Committees to help with personal decisions focusing one question, and Support Committees to help someone through something, whether it is a difficult time or life change or something else

Pp 188-190 I like the Healing the Meeting Community pages, which seem to also be a new addition

Pp 191-204. As for Marriage, I was surprised that there was not more than a passing reference or two to same sex marriages. Maybe there are still Monthly Meetings within BYM that don't support same sex marriage and that is the reason? If so, I think it should be more explicit about the reason for the downplaying. Also, it might be useful, with a footnote that it doesn't apply to all Meetings if necessary, to include additional queries particular to same sex marriage and to update the sample wedding certificate to be gender-neutral, e.g. him/her, husband/wife in all places. The new section on divorce is very compassionately addressed.

Glossary – very nice addition to Faith and Practice! I like the gentle editorializing. For instance, the information about “message” on page 247 is not just a definition but a guide.

Page 242 – Conservative – what does “Unaffiliated” refer to?

We could not figure out what happened to the sections on living in community, nurturing gifts, etc.

Index - Since this most excellent new edition is so much longer than the old ones, the index becomes even more important. I know that the job of indexing is unbelievably tedious, but you would be doing everyone a really big favor by making it more detailed.