

Faith & Practice Committee meeting, April 13, 2017, prior to SCYM '17

Draft Minutes

Committee members present: Beverly Randolph, Terry SoRelle, Emma Britain, Leada Dietz, Claudia Wilson and John Coffin, clerk, met at Green Family Camp. Four of the members are new to the committee. Yippee!

We began just before noon, and worked through a late lunch break, concluding at about 4 p.m. These minutes seek to report on the essential conversations that took place; attribution has been in most cases, deleted. Clerk had an agenda prepared.

We talked about connecting to the YM, and vice versa, in terms of the draft texts that we've put out on line. Is that really working? Might we ask Monthly Meetings to be more involved, perhaps through a liaison? Are we to consider ourselves as such? Shall we not poll monthly meetings anyway about what they'd like us to do?

The history of the committee was reviewed, and how at the beginning, 2011, YM clerk sent a letter to every clerk, announcing this initiative, its background deep from within the YM, and how every effort would be made to keep meetings in the know, through the internet, and that their contributions/responses would be welcomed. We then asked how much feedback had we received; Bev announced that someone has mentioned that the section on our history "was too long." There have been few other replies – to date - from meeting members and attenders, all things considered. At Rep Meeting, 2016, this topic came up again, and we were encouraged to communicate with Meetings more frequently. A period of "resetting" the relationship.

A discussion then ensued about the purpose of the F&P – is it to be a recognition of what our practices are? About what we are and have been doing? Or, a guide only, a kind of framework about Quaker beliefs and practices? What are Meetings currently using – if anything? We talked about this, since this came up at the very outset of the committee's work in 2011-12. Will we come to consider our text as canon, ultimately? As in, what we believe and what we don't believe? In any case, we won't be united on everything, even in the final draft. But if we seek to validate our beliefs and practices, and seek to be inclusive, won't that go a long way? What are the differences between a Universalist YM and a Christian YM? How do we know who we are? Will this effort further that cause? Will it provide us with a stronger identity – a more pronounced sense of what is it that we do believe? (As in, to a new-comer: "we don't have a creed, but we do believe in certain things.") Many of us are seeking more certainty in this regard. We recognized that SCYM has long been comfortable with a multiplicity of beliefs. How important is that? Also, we need to remember the many small meetings that make up our YM, and their relative isolation. In this regard, a broad spiritual framework for our work might be best for these groups. Don't we Quakers usually think of multiple solutions, instead of projecting, "There's just one answer to this?"

The Quakerland story, we were reminded, needs representing in whatever we publish, in a thoughtful, sensible and truthful manner. We mentioned if the “highlights” about the growth of SCYM wouldn’t be useful too. Or maybe some time-line that would thread through the work perhaps at the bottom or top of the pages. Someone used the term, “mix and meld,” as being helpful in preparing text.

We reflected that, according to a survey someone had (?), many members of SCYM are convinced Friends! No wonder we are hard to tie down in terms of our beliefs; who are we precisely? Isn’t this much more than Quaker experimentation? Or, rather, hasn’t this been much more, over the years, than a Quaker adventure? Let’s start giving it words and names!

We’ve made much of our “uniqueness.” Of what does that consist, exactly? How shall we give that uniqueness voice in this Faith & Practice? Well, it seems these points figure into that:

How we came together as a YM

That we are relatively small, as YM’s go

That we’re mainly convinced Friends

That our meetings are situated in a largely conservative portion of the USA

Looking forward, what advice will we give to monthly meetings about their use of a F&P from their own YM? Or will we be telling them? We need to recall how this committee came into being, too, at this juncture. A point was made about using some elements of the Procedures Manual in our text; we seemed okay with that, knowing that it will depend on several variables, etc. It will likely help in providing credibility and unity to a F&P.

When we are close to publication, at some time in the future, how will they be distributed?

We should remember the inclusiveness of the Quaker message, too. Being in a conservative part of the country, that means, more rigidity, perhaps? Less recognition given to ethnic diversity? Or not? Our contribution as Friends can be in this situation that there is that of God, the Light, in each one of us, regardless? There are many spiritual approaches, and our’s is one of them. Proven credible throughout our history. We have convinced Friends; we have those in transition – they come awhile and then leave. There is this randomness of our attendance, which is common for many smaller or moderate sized meetings. Our meetings tend, thus, to change often. This is a reality for many of us. It was asked, for instance, if many of our meetings have YAF’ers in attendance.

What are families and children seeking in our Meetings? They want more than just child-care, though that is very important. They want values being taught, and some Christian or faith-oriented stories. We remember that John Woolman spoke of a “a pure principle;” Spirit and Light covers so much of what we value most. And, being true to what we say and do. But,

aren't we in the end more alike than different? Think of Baltimore YM; we have more in common with it than we think; so, aren't our traditions the same? If we are to listen carefully to one another, mustn't we let go of our differences somewhat? Don't the real theological differences appear after these things get out there, and have been okayed already by some group? Too much emphasis on atonement and redemption, on Christ, the savior, can go too far for some of our people, no? Or, we're okay with different theological perspectives and specifics, but we all deeply respect our common values, and the things that tie us together.

Isn't our faith, first? And our practices, second? Might this not guide us in terms of doing the preparation and drafting of our F&P?

So, under the queries we will work up for contacting Monthly Meetings about this project, might be:

What are your Meeting's current practices?

How do you, for instance, perform weddings (or other events/programs) under your care?

Is Jesus, his life and teachings (and Christ-likeness, if that pertains) important to your meeting? How so? If not, how so?

How is the "Light" and "Spirit" considered in your Meeting, and experienced by those in your Meeting?

These items might be worthwhile agenda items for our Quarterly Meetings, during their sessions together. Clearly, they are most pertinent to all our Monthly Meetings, too.

(The book, "The Spirit of Quakers," by Geoffrey Durham(sic) was mentioned during these exchanges. Lots of books/references could be put in a list for us.)

Clerk suggested that we each work on drafting text and that we meet in September, at the Dallas Meeting, to review our progress as well as attend to the committee's next communications with the YM and each MM. There was enthusiasm for this step.

We looked at the "A List of Topics." which already had been drawn up at an earlier date – 2013 - by the committee and agreed to at RM. Under that outline, topic #1. History, for example, has been worked on. We have 3 draft texts in hand for this section, which need reworking.

It is mainly under Topic heading #2, Opening to the Spirit, #3, Testifying to the Life of the Spirit, and #4, Advices and Queries that our work needs to be done this coming summer. We each volunteered to work (prepare draft language) on specific topics:

John listed, under #2 – What Friends Believe, The Meeting for Worship, Seekers-the Spiritual Journey, and Vocal Ministry.

Bev listed, under #2 – Silence, prayer and meditation, and the scriptures, Friends and Jesus

Terry listed, also under #2 – Continuing revelation, the sacraments, Friends and other Faiths.

Emma listed, under #3 – The Quaker Testimonies-Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, Stewardship and Unity. She was also interested in “Being a Quaker Today – our personal lives and witness,” under topic heading #5.

Leada mentioned, also under #3 – Truthfulness-publishers of the Truth, the wholeness of creation, Inclusion, Social justice and civic responsibility, peace and non-violence, family and children, sexuality and the RSOF/SCYM. *

Claudia – am not sure you were present when we made these voluntary assignments. Your assistance will be big in helping to shorten, for instance, under Topic #1 – History, the section entitled: “A brief history of SCYM.” It is too long for a F&P, we all agree.

*Leada and Emma - These seem like a lot of topics and may not be good reporting on my part.

We’ll bear patiently with whatever can be done. This applies to all of us. Moving forward and ahead with draft text for any of the above is what is important, I believe we all agreed.

So, let me know if the above lists are off. But, feel free, also, if you “are on a roll with writing,” to look at them or any other topic on our two-page “List of Topics” that was drafted earlier. We probably should keep everyone in the loop if we move on to other areas, or change our plans so that there is less duplication. (On the other hand, some duplication of the same draft materials can’t be all bad!)

Thank you. Have a great summer,

In friendship and in the Light,

John