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Kennett Friends Meetinghouse
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Friends:

In this report, I will write briefly about our progress, our continued difficulties in some areas, and I will propose a few steps toward addressing these difficulties. Firstly, our use of the web to communicate and to build networks has fascinating potential. We have experienced growing attendance at Quarterly Meetings, and we are working more closely together. Secondly, while overall involvement has steadied and begun to increase, participation in leadership continues to lag. Finally, I believe there are a few easy steps we can take to relieve some of the burdens that our officers shoulder, to make the business we conduct together more rewarding, and to make leadership more attractive.

We have made a great deal of progress in the area of relationship building. We have started to get to know each other better. With the uptick in the number of youth who attend Quarterly Meetings, parents and our youth have met each other and begun to forge relationships. My hope is that these relationships will continue to bloom as we anticipate a new program called First Day School Convergences. The idea is simple: the first day school programs at our different monthly meetings take their youth on a “field trip” to one meeting. We join in one big first day school experience three or four times per year. Alongside this program, a new Religious Education Network has been created that allows for folks who work with youth at the different Monthly Meetings to spread informal and organic invitations with immediate reception. If you are interested in joining the network, email me at coordinator@westernquarterquakers.org. We are a stronger community when we are “networked” precisely because it allows us to maintain the strength of our relationships between meetings.

Aside from the support of Religious Education, I am currently working to revitalize programs for young Friends in Middle School and High School. A newly constituted Youth Meeting is emerging confidently. I am also coordinating with Concord Quarterly Meeting and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to bring the active resources for older youth that are already available more closely in touch with those in our community who seek them.

Our website also continues to improve as we work to give it both an outreach and in-reach function. Friends, now, can go to westernquarterquakers.org to learn about coming events and to read about the goings-on in our community. Friends will soon be able to view a slightly improved presentation of our constituent Monthly Meetings; their worship times and locations. You can also use the website to get updated forms for applying to grants, to see previous business meeting minutes, to register for upcoming events, to access the agenda and materials for upcoming business meetings, to view the Query presentation cycle, the Quarterly Meeting cycle, the newsletter and deadlines for submission, publications, etc.

While fellowship grows and worship deepens everywhere, our Quarterly Meeting’s administrative operations could use a tune up. Friends had identified this need approximately one year ago, and so the Committee and Leadership Reevaluation Advisory Group (a.k.a CLR) commenced to streamline the operations of the Quarterly

Meeting. A proposal has been made to consolidate almost all of the committees in our Quarterly Meeting into one Support Committee. I believe this plan can work to ease inefficiencies because it encourages connection. Our committees operate largely isolated from one another except where members of our committees attend business meeting. Many of our committees are populated by as few as one person, others by no one at all. This separation prevents us from enjoying each other's presence and from being reminded of the meaningful work we do on behalf of our Monthly Meetings and worship groups.

However, the consolidation of all our committees into one committee, the Support Committee, won't do us any good if we cannot also find the strength within ourselves to let go of what we must (even if this means finding some of our fiscal and physical assets new homes). There is much more discernment to follow, which is the harder work of identifying exactly what inspires us, creating processes that work to carry out this inspiration, and releasing all the rest. This discernment is easier the more we can truly claim we are people who know each other well and who believe that the work we do together has a meaningful impact. This, in turn, attracts others into participation and into leadership. There is nothing more repellant to a potential, new leader than an invitation that reads: "Our community is a sinking ship, and we desperately need you to come aboard and help bucket the flooding water back out into the sea." There is nothing more attractive to a potential, new leader than an invitation that reads: "Our community is vital and growing, we are doing important work, and we are excited for you to join us and help us shine brighter."

After the new Support Committee has been established, if Friends approve it, I suggest we initiate a priorities process in the development of a strategic plan. The strategic plan would identify a few inspiring projects and processes for carrying these out. For example, Bucks Quarterly Meeting conducted a priorities process and settled on three things—only three things.

I also suggest that we take a look at the job descriptions of our leadership positions. Especially Clerk, Treasurer, and Recording Clerk are begging for demystification. We have had to be flexible in this time of ebbing participation, but such flexibility has often meant that much of the operational responsibility of the Quarterly Meeting rests squarely on the shoulders of our Clerk and Treasurer without much support. With a clear job description for these roles and for the Recording Clerk role, we are more likely to find competent replacements who are aware of the healthy boundaries they are to maintain. Narrowly defined job descriptions coupled with a significant reduction in annual operational responsibilities, as a result of a strategic planning process, will make it easier for everyone to focus on what is important.

I would lastly suggest the use of a decision making grid. This is a technique I stole from Nonviolent Communication (www.cnvc.org) wherein we identify all the tasks that need to be completed over the course of a year. We write them up on a spreadsheet and then divide the tasks among us. When we have well-functioning committees, we can designate whole sets of the operational tasks to them. When committees are not well-functioning, whole sets of operational tasks are neglected. The decision making grid allows us to delegate tasks to one person or to a group of people, and every year there may be a different configuration of folks who are led to carry out certain tasks. This approach allows for organized flexibility (rather than the disorganized sort we have now)

such that too many tasks aren't saddled upon one person or group of people. For those positions or committees we keep from year to year, everyone has a very clear idea of what they are supposed to do and how it is meaningfully connected to the broader Quarterly Meeting community.

I have been thinking about a passage from Scripture when Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, he writes, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." Ever heard of Friends referring to, "the body?" This is the passage from whence the term comes, but now when we say, "the body," we usually just mean those who are gathered for business meeting. It really means that even as we are individual people, we are united as a whole by our shared spiritual search (where Christ is our head). Paul goes on to talk about the different positions that exist in community: "...first apostles, second prophets, third teachers," and then there are the different spiritual gifts that each member brings. Some of his examples are healing, assistance, leadership, and speaking in tongues. Each of us with different positions and gifts are important for the vitality of the whole community. Yet, in chapter 13 verses 1 through 3 he writes: "If I speak in the tongues of mortals, and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." I take from this the reminder that everything we do from worship, business meeting, on out must happen in the context of relationship. In a world where love is all that matters, letting go of everything else seems a cinch. I join Friends in creating a world where love is all that matters.