

Report to Executive Committee on IMYM 05 Evaluations August, 2005

Summary of Friends Comments by Eric Wright, Continuing Committee Clerk

This year 103 Friends filled out evaluation forms, a drop of 45 from last year, closer to the number two years ago. I'm not sure what's behind this drop, although care and persistence in getting them handed out and collected again is surely an important determining factor.

General Observations After tallying responses, retyping and grouping written comments, and scanning through all the forms a number of times, I think it helps to remind ourselves of the strengths and limits of these surveys. First of all, while Friends in general have clear judgments on many parts of their Yearly Meeting experience and work hard at making many useful suggestions for improvements, we don't hear from everyone or even a majority of those who attend. We don't hear directly in these surveys from any of those IMYM Friends who do not attend yearly meeting, whether because they're too busy, don't feel they can afford it, have serious concerns about Ghost Ranch as the location (too far, too remote, too hard to get around, uncomfortable beds or bathrooms, too hot, too many bugs) or about the program we plan, or maybe just have never been adequately informed and invited.

In the surveys we do receive, there is numerical data from the ones though fives circled in each area and also written comments. The form offers under each area a choice of "N/A" defined as "I have no idea." Some Friends do make this selection, but others just leave some areas blank, while some Friends note in their comments that they did not attend the Business sessions or do not have children in a given age group but still circle a number or add a comment.

Those of us who turn in the survey form tend to be positive in our responses. I counted only eight responses of "1" ("Pitiful, hopeless, what a mess, AGGGGGHH!") and in fact I felt confident based on written comments in changing all but two of the circled "1"s to "5"s, concluding that at least one Friend got the number system backwards. 102 circled responses under Housing and Camping, 99 under Venue or Location, and 99 under Speaker and Theme, but only 54 under Golf Carts and 17 under Junior Young Friends. Eighty out of the 102 wrote something under "The Best Part of IMYM for me..."

Finally, as previous reports have noted, Friends have different preferences and different experiences. You can almost count on finding directly contradictory comments on nearly every topic. One of the challenges in reading and summarizing the surveys is how much weight to give to different views and especially dissenting voices when the weight of opinion clearly lies in one direction: for example, those of us who fill out the survey clearly have overwhelming positive responses to Ghost Ranch, but there are also reminders of the burdens of distance placed on Friends in Utah and Arizona, and specific concerns about medical care or ease of mobility.

With all these cautions, here are some reflections on what the surveys tell us:

Housing and Camping

We continue to see general high ratings along with specific complaints or suggestions. Everyone's experience was affected by the no-see-ums this year, but particularly the campers. (Campers also continue to call for better communication, so they can keep up with what's happening.)

Meals

Overall scores in this area dropped slightly. Comments continued to be quite divided, with some noting overall improvement (*great variety, delicious, lots of greens and vegetables*) while others are still unhappy in very specific areas (*not enough fresh fruit, veggies or vegetarian protein... Too much white flour and refined food... Vegetarians are still second class..., no provisions for wheat allergies...! wish for a healthier diet*).

Children's Yearly Meeting & Nursery

Comments and circled responses were positive here (*Julie Wigton Rocks! ... Wonderful caretakers*). There was a thoughtful suggestion about ways to include the children in hearing the memorial minutes.

Junior Young Friends

We have clearly had difficulties maintaining a large enough group of adult leaders for this age group. Comments were appreciative of the adults who were there, especially Mark Holdaway. One writer asked *Would we like to revisit the idea of a Monthly Meeting planning for this group?*

Senior Young Friends

Friends appreciate the leadership that continues to come forward in the SYF group. There are still calls for more structure during the early days, and for more occasions when SYFers join in the larger Yearly Meeting program. *I wish the SYFs could have been with us for the uplifting final Sunday morning Meeting for Worship.*

Schedule and Communications

Some concerns remain about communication, especially the need to improve the opportunities for our entire group to be informed of activities during our time together. Spoken announcements in the dining hall are often not heard, and there are really no times when we are all together. The daily newsletter and bulletin boards may be our best vehicles. But the main concern voiced continues to be a rushed feeling in the schedule, despite our fifteen minute adjustment this year. *Would like to see more time for breakfast and getting to worship sharing... Why isn't breakfast at 7 am with more time between it and worship*

sharing... Many were late for worship sharing. This and the general sense of “fullness” of activities seems to be an important issue for the Yearly Meeting planning.

Golf Carts. Access, Getting Around

This seems to work well.

Orientation for Newcomers

Friends liked the “Old Hats”! Also, *How about a guided walk tour?*

Fees, Costs, Scholarship Process

We received a wide range of comments on costs of Yearly Meeting. *Seems a bit expensive. We can afford it but cost must really add up for families.*

Registration

People seemed largely content with this area. Some still think the forms are too complicated, but Friends generally felt cared for. *Eileen did a great job.... Friendly calm registrar.*

Pre-Session Workshops, “Early Days”

Many positive comments here, as with last year. *I love this time of retreat and study.*

Interest Groups

Again this year: *Too many choices... / just wish there could be time for more interest groups, or that they could be repeated. and I believe one hour interest groups are really too short.*

Worship Sharing

We still have many concerns about time pressures.

Invited Speaker and Theme

Orion’s talk was deeply appreciated by many, though some found it and the general theme of prophesying challenging. *Absolutely amazing!... This may be the best I’ve heard since 1988... Right on target for me... but also I felt she covered too much ground in one session, needed time to ponder all the ideas.*

Plenary Sessions: Business and Worship

Many positive comments appreciating our clerks. *Hal and Cynthia did an extremely good job of time management and keeping peace.... We did need a bit more time for some of the*

business.... Worship on Saturday afternoon excellent.

Committees

Some concerns about orientation, and communication about where and when committees are meeting.

Venue (IE: Location. Ghost Ranch)

Many comments on this subject. Great love for Ghost Ranch, but also objections. *This place is heaven on earth... We are blessed... Next year don't invite the BUGS!... Tough access to Logan/SLC... Garlic is the best antidote for the bugs--try to swallow without chewing.*

Evening Programs

This category still needs a separate section on the questionnaire, but got a number of comments under Other... *Talent Night way too long. Find a way to shorten it...Should have a two hour limit.,* and also *Why are family activities like folk-dancing scheduled so late in the evening?*

The Best Part of IMYM for me was....

*Being with other Friends. ..the People!.. .the community... the Fellowship*but also a wide variety of specific workshops, speakers, hikes, singing, Many Friends resisted naming one "best part", really responding to this special time as an integrated whole.

A personal perspective. I hope those of us taking on responsibilities for planning the Yearly Meeting gathering will focus some attention on the recurring and inter-related themes of time and crowded schedules, avoiding the pressure of rushed business sessions, the challenge of finding willing volunteers to take on roles of service and leadership in the Yearly Meeting, and the need to find ways to include replenishing relaxed time for ourselves, shared fun activities with our children, learning from each other, and attention to strengthening the ways Friends can act in the world and honor our traditions, all under the leading of the Spirit.

--Eric Wright