

Intermountain Yearly Meeting June 19<sup>th</sup> 2020

Report of the Committee for Ministry and Counsel

The committee was asked to consider two positions that might be adopted by the Yearly Meeting. The first was the possibility that Intermountain Yearly Meeting would formulate new practice that would allow individuals to become members of the Yearly Meeting instead of a Monthly Meeting. The second was based on the Friends General Conference proposed policy on harassment and how to deal with it. The question that was asked was if IMYM had such a policy and if not were we considering one.

Membership was first introduced by Friends in the 1600's because people who had no connection to the Society were making false claims about what Quakers believed. These claims were putting Friends in danger, the institution of membership was introduced to be able to say who were real Quakers.

Even today there are people who want to be able to say they are Quaker without spending the time, study, and association within the community of a Meeting that turns someone into a Quaker. If someone were to become a member of the Yearly Meeting one of the many questions that would arise would be "What community is providing support, instruction and oversight for this member?"

Eastern Quakerism dates to the 1600's. A child growing up in such a Meeting absorbs Quakerism by osmosis. Sadly, this is not the case in the Intermountain West. Here, even adults occasionally find themselves looking to the rule book, various Faith and Practices, to find out how Quakers do something. If there is a First Day school it is usually small and frequently not too informative. Quaker children here feel the love of Practice from parents but usually gain understanding of Quaker Practice as Junior or Senior Young Friends at Yearly Meeting. This experience and bonding create a strong feeling of belonging to Yearly Meeting more than to their Monthly Meeting. These are the people most likely to seek membership in the Yearly Meeting. These experiences are powerful but even Senior Young friends graduate from High School and move on to college, jobs and other experiences which tend to eclipse the once a year experiences of Yearly Meeting. Membership is an on going process of growth which informs how all aspects are lived. It requires year round involvement in the community of a Meeting.

To start granting Membership to the Yearly Meeting we have to answer the question of how to create a viable community of people who may be scattered all over the country that is able to meet on a weekly basis and support each other in all the ways that a monthly meeting does. There are other questions but the largest one would be who is in charge of the Yearly Meeting?

The concern about harassment was raised from the FGC policy. Although harassment can be physical the form that was of primary concern was the use of inappropriate language. The use of language that implied the speaker was superior, use of phrases or pronouns that the listener found offensive or threatening, Having read the policy the committee felt that the questions being addressed were ones that need to be addressed but the approach taken by FGC was too adversarial. It seeks to assign blame and have the Meeting apply punishment. It was felt necessary to point out that it had not yet been reviewed by legal council.

The committee felt a more caring and respectful approach was appropriate for IMYM. It was felt that most of verbal harassment comes from ignorance on the part of the harasser. To solve many of these incidents we have to help everyone at Meeting feel safe enough to be able to tell the harasser that what was said hurtful and why. Everyone at meeting also has to be willing to listen to what was said and be willing to hear what was said. This sounds like a tall order except it is standard practice at Friends camp and works well. At the start of camp everyone has a chance to say what the rules are with the expectation that each person will do their best to follow them. A similar process could be instituted before IMYM. There is also the expectation that everyone deserves to feel safe and be respected. An important part of this approach will be to help members of the Meeting to realize that listening with out judging is vital to making respect real.

There will be times when a more formal process will be needed. One of the Senior Young Friends on the committee was very impressed by how well the Restorative Justice program in her school worked. There is considerable information about Restorative Justice online. Many schools and other groups have found that a system of respect and caring like this are much more effective than finding guilt and punishment.

Ted Bordwell, Clerk of Ministry and Counsel