

October 3, 2005

Dear Clerks and other Friends;

At our 345<sup>th</sup> Annual Sessions, New England Friends were challenged by our keynote speaker to “be carried where we do not wish to go: out from our pleasant benches and into the needy world.” In lively and well-attended discernment groups during our first full day together, we wrestled with what it is that God is calling us to be and do, both individually and corporately. We struggled to understand how we can remain part of the wider family of Friends represented by Friends United Meeting, when we believe their personnel policy to be discriminatory. And as our epistle notes in its opening words, the continuing violence in the world was always heavy on our hearts, especially as we considered the actions of our nation, undertaken with our money and in our name.

Yet our days together were also joyful and refreshing, filled with the hopeful voices of our children. At times, they called us back into worship and forward into witness in the most profound and powerful ways. If you were unable to attend Sessions, talk with someone in your monthly or quarterly meeting who did; try to get a sense of their experience of NEYM as a gathered people. Please consider whether *your* light and leadings might be shared more widely in the coming year, including joining us next August!

Since it takes some months to complete and distribute the annual Minute Book, this letter and the accompanying minutes will give you a picture of some of the matters that came before us.

Minute **05-16** summarizes the responses of Friends to the discernment process initiated by the *ad hoc* Procedural Review Committee, which occupied us for much of Sunday afternoon and evening at Sessions. The committee will continue to consider the information they gathered, and they intend to make intervisitation an important part of their work during the coming year. Perhaps you would like to invite some of them to your meeting to continue the discernment of who we are and what we are called to be.

Minute **05-21** & **05-56** report on the continuing work of the *Faith and Practice* Revision Committee, as they strive to bring us new understandings of that vital resource. Last month you should have received a report from them and a request for your ongoing participation in their process.

Minute **05-23** contains within it the minute brought to us by Young Friends after their experiences of our open worship, following the intergenerational worship they had planned and led on Sunday morning. We were humbled by the love and clarity of their concern for the whole community.

Two official representatives and seven other Young Adult Friends were sent forth in prayer and song to attend the World Gathering of Young Friends, held in England during the week following Sessions. These gatherings, under the care of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, occur only once every fifteen or twenty years. We were able to fully support the needs of our YAFs for assistance with travel and conference costs, as well as those of two representatives from Cuba Yearly Meeting. This was possible because of the very generous response of Friends to the fine fundraising efforts of our NEYM Young Adult Friends group.

In Minute **05-32**, we laid down one committee (Mosher Book & Tract) and approved the creation of another (Publications & Communications). They are in need of some energetic and committed members; contact the NEYM Nominating Committee! And in Minute **05-33**, we made the *ad hoc* Development Committee, so successful during their first two years of work among us, into a standing committee.

We heard lively, thoughtful, challenging, humorous and musical staff reports. Joyfully, we approved rehiring of the staff, (Minute **05-68**) and also heard plans of the Coordinating & Advisory Committee to call a Staffing Consultation on 10/30/05 at Framingham Friends Meeting. At that time, Friends will begin

the process of defining a staff structure to carry forward the work of the Yearly Meeting for the next several years.

Our Friends Camp Director told us of decreased attendance during the '05 season and the serious economic implications thereof. The Camp Committee will be addressing these concerns together with the YM Finance Committee. Friends approved a loan to help the Camp through the winter season (Minute **05-64**). The Friends Home Committee graciously gifted us with time in a crowded agenda by forgoing their oral report, sharing instead their wonderful new sign. The Head of Moses Brown School reported on efforts to bring their investment portfolio in line with their socially responsible investment policy. Friends were troubled by issues raised in this report; some also expressed continuing concerns about the admissions policies of the school. We need to take seriously the invitation from the school to put aside some of the matters of corporate restructure that have occupied us recently, and to focus on deepening our spiritual relationship and strengthening the Quaker presence at Moses Brown. (Minutes **05-46 & 74**).

Connecticut Valley Quarter shared their minute in support of same gender marriage, and invited us to take it home to share with our own monthly meetings to enrich the discernment process on this matter. It is included in Minute **05-55**.

We received a full report from our Friends United Meeting Committee, including accounts of work in Kenya and of our representatives to the recent FUM triennial. These are summarized in Minute **05-36**. Much time and energy were devoted to the report of our Ministry & Counsel working party on the FUM Personnel Policy, created at the 2004 Sessions as part of our Minute of Exercise (**04-74**). Minutes **05-37, 47, 49 & 60** record our struggles and our final approval of the new minute brought forth by the working party. You will see that there is much work to be done here in New England, as well as with our brothers and sisters in the rest of Friends United Meeting. To support this intervisitation, the Finance Committee was directed to create a special fund (Minute **05-61**); substantial contributions have already been given to it.

Finally, we were challenged by the gift of a Statement on Peace from our Young Friends, and in simple, direct language, we tried to affirm our commitment to non-violence and to our Peace Testimony (Minute **05-76**). We urged individual Friends and our monthly meetings to take actions reflecting this testimony, and I would treasure reports from any of you that I might share as inspiration with the wider Quaker community in New England.

***Please share these concerns with the appropriate committee or individual(s) in your meeting, and/or post this packet in a place where members and attenders alike will see what issues have life among us in the Yearly Meeting. Feel free to ask for additional copies of this packet from the YM office, or look for a future posting of this letter on the web site: [www.neym.org](http://www.neym.org).***

Thank you for your good and faithful efforts as clerk of your meeting. It is my conviction that to be called to such service by the community you love is a great and humbling gift. That conviction was only reinforced by our time together at Sessions this summer. May God lift you up and keep you in this work.



Christopher McCandless, clerk, New England Yearly Meeting