

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends

The Religious Society of Friends in New England

10/3/07

Dear Clerks and other Friends,

This is the annual “advance documents” packet that it is our custom to send to you before the 2007 Minute Book makes its colorful appearance. Together with the attached State of Society report, I hope to communicate to you and your monthly meeting a sense of the important matters that came before us at our 347th yearly meeting sessions held in August.

When the new Minute Book arrives, it will include all the committee reports as well as their Purposes & Procedures; minutes of business sessions and epistles of all the bodies of New England Yearly Meeting (from the youngest to the oldest) gathered in Smithfield, Rhode Island this summer; and addresses, statistical information, and directions to all the meetings and worship groups that make up our faith community. Please take time to distribute copies to individuals and families in your meeting, and use it to become engaged in the wider work of Friends—including that time-tested Quaker tradition of intervisitation!

As we gathered in August, there was a sense of foreboding that a number of potentially divisive matters lay before us. It was difficult to believe that, with God’s help, we could create the sanctuary to which our theme called us: that we might be taken together to places that we could not imagine in our minds alone, or that in our hearts we feared to go. However, we were profoundly blessed by the ministry of our keynote speaker, our Bible Half-hour leader, and many other Friends. In her keynote, Duduzile Mtshazo of Central & Southern Africa Yearly Meeting told us powerful stories of overcoming racism and homophobia that lifted our hearts and hopes. In the daily Bible Half-hours, well-attended by Friends from several generations, our own Benigno Sanchez-Eppler delighted and challenged us as he wove together themes of sanctuary: created for our children, for the stranger in our midst, and for the presence of God in our daily lives,

On Sunday evening, Ministry & Counsel sponsored a wonderful, energetic and thought-provoking presentation by our former staff member Lisa Graustein, ably assisted by Young Friends. In a series of “live-action power points,” they led us through 350 years of Quaker history in 25 minutes. They helped us grasp the many events that have led us to our current struggles with the Friends United Meeting personnel policy. In small groups that evening, in hours of patient listening to one another and the Spirit throughout the week, large numbers of Friends worked to bring back to the gathered meeting for business minutes ’07-17, 18, 21, 50, 51 & 77 which you will find attached. When the body approved their work, we were reminded that our unity only girds our struggles with love. We continue to have much work to do.

On Monday, we heard the report from the Moses Brown School, and the recommendation from our Permanent Board that Friends approve the four proposals developed during the past year by the joint MBS-NEYM "Project." Once again, large numbers of Friends held several threshing meetings during the ensuing days, working to bring back to the gathered body a minute with which we might unite in moving forward. As you will see in minutes '07-29, 30, 60 & 72, Friends felt clear to approve some but not all of the recommendations of the "Project." However, the sense of involvement in building a nurturing and caring relationship with MBS was strongly reinforced, as well as our desire to examine our faithfulness to the original dreams and gift of Friend Moses Brown.

We were also challenged to discern the way forward to an appropriate NEYM staffing structure, a concern that has been with us for several years and has been the subject of numerous consultations and ad hoc committee work. From minutes '07-27 & 61, you will see that the body tasked our Permanent Board to discern whether a consultant, familiar with the work and concerns of Friends, might be useful to us in moving toward some resolution of this work.

We gave "preliminary approval" to the *Faith and Practice* Revision Committee's new chapter on Worship! As you will see in minutes '07-19, 45 & 65, this means that you and your meeting have received this chapter, and are encouraged to use it throughout the year, and to communicate with the committee any helpful responses that use might engender. You have also received a new working paper titled *A Brief History of Friends in New England*, and responses are welcome.

Finally, I must report to you my own powerful sense of the presence of God in our midst during our time together in Rhode Island. Through times of anguish and joy, through exhaustion and elation, we were bound together and lifted up by the many gifts of the Spirit, working through us all. Once again, I thank you for your good and faithful work as clerk of your own meeting. It is still my conviction that to be called to such service by the community you love is a great and humbling gift. May God lift you up, and keep you in this work. And if you were not able to be with us this summer, please consider joining us next August!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher McCandless". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher McCandless, clerk
New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends