

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends

The Religious Society of Friends in New England

10/13/08

Dear Clerks and other Friends,

Outside my windows, the Vermont hills are ablaze in glorious color. Once again, it is autumn, and time to write my last letter as outgoing clerk to Friends in New England Yearly Meeting. It is particularly addressed to those in your meeting community who were unable to be with us at our 348th YM Sessions last summer. Although we were blessed with the largest attendance in recent memory—805—I am always aware of the many more who are part of the worship and witness of Friends throughout NEYM.

With the attached State of Society report from our Ministry & Counsel Committee, this letter and the minutes to which it refers should serve to share with you some sense of our time at YM Sessions, in advance of the 2008 Minute Book. When that book makes its own colorful appearance early next year, it will include all the minutes, memorial minutes, epistles, committee reports, financial statements, statistical information, address lists and directories (with directions!) to all the meetings and worship groups that make up NEYM. Please distribute the Minute Book widely in your meeting, and encourage Friends to make good use of it, especially for that excellent Quaker tradition of intervisitation!

We gathered this year with the theme “War: God help us!” In the opening session, I prayed for God to help us be witnesses to the ways of peace; to help us forgive one another for our wars of words within our own Quaker world; to redeem us from despair at our failures of stewardship of creation. We had six days together of hard work, sometimes painful listening, and difficult discernment. Yet God was present in those times, as well as in wonderful times of worship and celebration.

We were once again greatly blessed by the ministries of our two speakers and our Tuesday evening songstress. Ernestine Bucemi, clerk of New York Yearly Meeting, called us to be witnesses to the war within and the war without, to be ready to take risks in the cause of peace and justice, and to pray for the strength to know that God will help us in this work. Peter Crysedale, pastor at our own Allen’s Neck MM, challenged us in provocative Bible Half-hours to remember that no minutes will resolve our conflicts; instead we must come to love one another from that deep place that wells up in us as we sit together in the presence of God’s grace. And Anaïs Mitchell, who grew up attending our Young Friends programs and performing her first songs at our YM Sessions coffeehouses, told stories of her life as a troubadour in the Middle East and across America, while singing for us and with us in a great affirmation of the power of music to unite us in the works of justice and peace.

On Sunday afternoon, after listening to the State of Society report, we heard from the Ministry & Counsel Committee’s Working Party on Spirituality & Sexual Ethics. (**Minute 15**) Their words helped to set the stage for Sunday evening’s reports from our eight quarterly meetings. (**Minute 19**) This recognition of the importance of our quarters was a new practice we found useful, and plan to continue at future sessions.

As usual, Monday morning was the time to hear from Moses Brown School. We also heard a recommendation from the Permanent Board for the creation of a new corporate structure for the School, with NEYM maintaining ownership of the land and the responsibility for the nurturance and care of Quaker education which lies at the heart of Moses Brown's gift. After consideration by concerned Friends during the week, we directed this work to the Permanent Board for further discernment, expecting them to return to the body with a recommendation for our approval. (**Minutes 25, 26 & 57**)

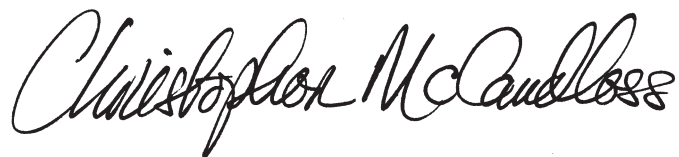
On Monday evening, we heard from both the Development and Finance Committees that our budget faces a serious shortfall, approaching a crisis situation. At that same session, we heard the concerns of some Friends over our financial contribution to Friends United Meeting, in light of its personnel policy. (**Minutes 30 & 31**) We returned to these matters Wednesday evening in a long, difficult and sometimes painful session. We listened deeply for leadings of the Spirit in one another's words, and sometimes in the silence. It is very important that you read **Minute 63** to best understand the place to which we were led that evening.

During YM Sessions, we also gave preliminary approval to the *History Chapter* of our slowly emerging revision of *Faith and Practice*. We continued our lengthy consideration of the YM staffing structure, hearing the report of two Quaker consultants whose study has forwarded this work during the past year. We committed ourselves to a year of deep discernment and active participation in the ongoing process.

Finally, we turned some of our attention to the "war without," asking God to help us be a more visible people of peace. We approved a *Statement on the war in Iraq* forwarded to us from our Northwest Quarter. (**Minute 51**) We approved *A Minute on Peace* forwarded from Salem Quarter, and ask you to give special attention to the call to monthly meetings in its closing words. (**Minute 52**) We also reaffirmed our 2006 Minute on Torture, with some specific instructions as to whom it should be sent, and authorized the Permanent Board to discern whether we should join the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. (**Minutes 53 & 69**)

I am continually humbled by the gifts of grace that God showers on our little community of faith. Whatever I have been given to bring to the work these past four years is not of my own, but rather a manifestation of those gifts of God's grace to us all. It has been a joy to serve you. I pray that you, in your work as clerk of your meeting, are sometimes surprised by joy in the same unexpected places I have been. May the Spirit bless you, and keep you, and bring you forth to support the new clerk, Linda Jenkins, in the same ways you have cared for me.

In peace,

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

Christopher McCandless