

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends

The Religious Society of Friends in New England

Dear Friends,

The Yearly Meeting and I are both in transition. I come to you, to begin service as your clerk, having closed my law practice, rented my family's home in New Hampshire, moved to Beacon Hill Friends House and taken a "day job" as meeting secretary of Friends Meeting at Cambridge, the largest of New England's 67 monthly meetings.

The Yearly Meeting is in transition in a number of areas. In recognition of that fact we have designated this to be a Year of Discernment and we have called for a second gathering of the corporate body to be held early in 2009. Discernment is in fact going on in a number of sectors of our community. Here are 3:

- Ministry & Counsel and Peace & Social Concerns Committees are trying to see if they are called to work together in planning the called gathering.
- Permanent Board has a Steering Committee that has been considering to what we are called and what does this mean for our staff.
- Nominating Committee is planning a retreat the evening before the next Committee Day to explore whether it has a role in helping the Yearly Meeting revisit its committee structure.

On September 20, Sessions Committee discerned the theme for this year (culminating in our time together next August): "Living into Jubilee".

For the early Israelites, Jubilee, as described in the Book of Leviticus (Chapter 25), meant first resting the land from human burdens. It also meant forgiveness of indebtedness, release from bondage: human institutions. Jesus taught about this Jubilee in Luke Chapter 4, verses 16-19.

This theme emerged as we looked back at our theme for last year, concerned with complicity in our nation's practice of war, and looked forward to the work ahead, in carrying out the year of discernment, seeking right relationships in our staff structure and with other resources in our care, including ourselves, our land.

Jubilee is, then, a kind of laying-down of *everything* in order to be reconnected with the divine. It is a kind of new beginning, to let go of old structures, old business where there may not be life, and be ready with hands as empty as possible to receive what God is asking of us.

I pray, as part of our work together we will ask each other, what is the Spirit asking of me/us? Is the Spirit asking me/us to move forward on this or is this a piece of work that I/we can lay aside for a time to attend to that still small voice, the sole authentic authority for movement?

And the second part of this process is to hold ourselves accountable for acting on what insight, perhaps vision, we are given. In order to do that, we need to be concrete and specific in naming not only what we are called to but what we are currently doing.

To that end, I suggest (for the moment, though I may require in the future) that any minutes brought for consideration by the corporate body contain a description of what resources will be allocated or implicated in the proposed minute. Many minutes may not involve any resource allocation other than the paper and stamps and minutes needed to create a letter to send to others. Nonetheless, I suggest a breakdown and specification of those items will better confront us with the nature and reality of any proposed "action."

Finally, I ask for your prayers and gentle honesty as supports for my time as presiding clerk. I cannot do this without the divine and you are the hands, feet, tongues, eyes and ears of that Source.

Blessings and love,

Linda Jenkins, clerk, NEYM

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