

Some minutes of the Annual Sessions 2008  
of New England Yearly Meeting for preparative, monthly, and quarterly meetings  
as well as worship groups from the presiding clerk

**Minute 08-15.** We heard a report from the Working Party on Spirituality & Sexual Ethics. They have begun the work of articulating the Yearly Meeting's sexual ethics and the spirituality of sex, recognizing that we cannot effectively criticize the sexual ethics reflected in the FUM personnel policy without first defining our own. Monthly and quarterly meetings will be receiving a packet of resource materials this fall and members of the working party are available to support monthly meetings in their discernment process, which will in turn lead to further discernment by the YM. They intend to collaborate with the Working Party on Racism in an exploration of institutional "isms" and their impact on society at large, as well as the Religious Society of Friends.

Friends were invited to respond to the report and to share their concerns. Friends expressed appreciation for the work of this group. We heard from Friends who spoke of the joyful and life-changing experience of doing the difficult and uncomfortable work of discussing sexuality and ethics. We were reminded that we have been given the Divine gift of the opportunity to struggle with these issues as a part of FUM. Some Friends expressed grave discomfort over our financial resources going to support an organization that has a policy that discriminates against gay and lesbian people. There are Friends who are not comfortable maintaining our membership in FUM. Other Friends spoke of the great value of the work being done by our dear Friends, our FUM family. Additional concerns were raised about the recent re-affirmation of the Richmond Declaration at the FUM General Board meeting in Kenya. We were asked to consider how we approach our struggle with right relationship with FUM. Is this reflective of the seeds of war within us? If we cannot reconcile with our Quaker family, how can we speak as peacemakers to a violent world?

**Minute 08-19.** NEYM quarterly meeting clerks or their representatives shared the past year's work accomplished in the quarters around the 06-67 minute of commitment revealing a wide diversity of response. Some meetings who have already minuted their support of marriage for all revisited this issue again. Some meetings began this work by looking at sexuality and sexual ethics in a broader way. These meetings plan on continuing their work in the coming year. Other meetings found other issues pressing and have not yet begun the process, although they hope to in the near future. Our reflections after the quarterly meeting clerks' reports underlined our frustration, our pain, and our hope.

Quarterly meeting clerks also reported on minutes that have come to quarter around other concerns. Northwest QM shared a letter that was sent in support of Kenyan Friends peace work in the post election violence there and a minute in opposition to the war in Iraq. Salem QM shared a minute in opposition to wars currently being waged by the United States. These minutes were referred to Peace & Social Concerns for discussion and discernment. The presiding clerk thanked the clerks of the quarters for all of their good work.

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**Minute 08-25.** Joanne Hoffman, head of school, reported for the Moses Brown School with members of board, project group, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Joanne will be retiring at the end of the coming academic year after 15 years at Moses Brown. She expressed gratitude for all she has learned from New England Yearly Meeting Friends. She underlined four events at the school: a long term collaboration with Hope High School that resulted in a play focusing on Moses Brown's decision to free the slaves he owned in 1773; a traveling exhibit about the slave trade on an extended stay at MBS, middle schools queries around sustainability; and middle school teacher Yolanda Gonzalez receiving a grant to participate in an African Great Lakes Initiative work camp project and in an Alternative to Violence Program in Rwanda.

Several students expressed their delight at the accepting diverse community at Moses Brown. It is a safe and nurturing environment to explore the Inner Light.

**Minute 08-26.** Richard Frechette (Smith), clerk of Permanent Board, presented recommendations about the Yearly Meeting's relationship with Moses Brown School. NEYM owns the land on which the school is built, and is responsible for nurturance and care of Quaker education at the school in perpetuity by virtue of accepting the deeded gift from Friend Moses Brown. Mindful of this we were asked to consider the following for approval:

- 1) Creation of a new corporation which will own and maintain the buildings and facilities. NEYM will maintain ownership of the land and will lease it to this new corporation for a nominal fee.
- 2) Delegation to Permanent Board the development of incorporation papers as a Rhode Island non-profit corporation, recognizing that it will be structured in accordance with the existing by-laws of Moses Brown School.
- 3) Authorization of the Permanent Board to give final approval to the new corporate structure.

Friends were not yet clear to move forward with these proposals but hope to return later during YM Sessions, after meeting with those concerned.

*See minute 57 for the continuation of this business item.*

**Minute 08-57.** Richard Frechette, clerk of Permanent Board communicated a list of concerns about the ongoing relationship between YM and Moses Brown School. These were discussed in 2 threshing sessions during the week. After hearing responses from the body, we directed the Permanent Board to consider all the concerns stated and to discern whether it is necessary to create a new corporate structure to insure, as Friends Moses Brown mandated "the continued effective governance" of the school, given the financial and legal realities of today. We expect Permanent Board will come back to the body with a recommendation for our approval. While noting that some Friends were not easy with this proposal, the clerk stated our unity to so instruct the PB.

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**Minute 08-30.** Gerry Sazama (stor) and Carolyn Hilles (BHil) reported for the Development Committee. Their theme this year is “Just imagine...” Just imagine all the Quakers of New England living the Lord’s Prayer that Jesus taught us.

NEYM's finances approach a crisis situation. Monthly meeting contributions have fallen for the past two years and this year we are also having difficulty reaching our goal of individual donations. Cash reserves are below the criterion of having reserves that equal three months of expenses. There are many ways to contribute to the yearly meeting. Friends should consider in what ways they might donate.

**Minute 08-31.** Eileen Cummings (Wint), clerk of Finance Committee, presented the preliminary budget for FY09. She recognized the difficult work of the committee in creating a budget in the face of a serious deficit. This year the committee received requests that exceeded income by \$100,000, none of which were frivolous. Half of the proposed budget cuts come from general funds and the other half from staff expenses. An anonymous gift of \$25,000 was made to ameliorate proposed cuts to staff. To satisfy the remaining deficit in this area, the funding for the administrative assistant position was eliminated. Contributions to Friends organizations were either cut substantially or eliminated. A particularly painful cut is to the travel budget, which will directly impact visitation, so vital to the health of our monthly meetings. Friends must discern what work we are called to do and how we can best allocate the funds we have to do that work.

A concern was expressed to set realistic limits on what the administrative & communications secretary is being asked to do with the elimination of the funding for the administrative assistant position. We weaken our core by making cuts and setting unachievable expectations. A question was raised about developing a positive contingency plan, with preparations to allocate additional funds should income exceed budget predictions. Some Friends raised a desire to find a way to contribute to Yearly Meeting without contributing to FUM, as a matter of conscience. It was recommended that this concern be brought back to their monthly and quarterly meeting for further seasoning.

Are we facing hard economic times in our monthly meetings? Our advanced documents show that membership across quarterly meetings has declined. How can we be more effective in outreach and communication with monthly meetings? Friends were invited to continue this discussion at the Finance Committee meeting prior to the body considering the budget for approval.

*See minute 63 for the continuation of this business item.*

**Minute 08-63.** Eileen Cummings, clerk of Finance Committee, presented their final version of the FY09 budget. She thanked those who participated this week in informational and discussion meetings. Friends brought several concerns: the need for NEYM to do a better job communicating with monthly meetings; the significant reductions to our travel budgets; and our continued financial support of FUM.

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The Finance Committee commits to better communication with monthly meetings. They restored \$16,150 for representatives and staff travel and also increased the Puente de Amigos budget by \$800 to cover the costs of registration for Cuba YM representatives to NEYM sessions. Those additions leave us of a deficit of \$17000. Friends witnessed to their sense that we can cover this deficit and even restore the budget to its 08 levels with an expanded commitment of everyone in the Yearly Meeting.

The committee also committed itself to exploring, over the course of the coming year, how we can honor the conscientious objection of some Friends to their participation in our financial contribution to FUM.

Friends spoke to their pain, to their desire to uphold the testimony of equality, to their sense of intolerable complicity with the intolerance of the FUM personnel policy. Many Friends see opposition to the approval of a budget that includes our contribution to FUM as an expression of their conscience. Many Friends see approval of the budget as presented to be an affirmation of their commitment to remaining members of FUM. Many Friends resonated with the call to continue that process of “cleaning our own house” that we began with our 2007 Minute of Commitment.

The clerk found the gathering united in our desire to get our house in order. We need to discern how we can honor the call of conscience to follow our Minute of Commitment. We recognize the unity of love that we have here for one another and all our neighbors. We accept this budget as amended by the Finance Committee, naming that there are Friends among us who are not easy—who are in pain—with this decision. We commit ourselves to moving forward in the faith that way will open in our monthly meetings and in the NEYM Finance Committee to enable Friends in good conscience to contribute to NEYM without contributing to FUM.

We give thanks to God for giving us those Friends among us who hold us to our commitments. We give thanks that NEYM has been called to proclaim that it is our experience that God gives us the gifts of ministry, leadership and grace—regardless of how are fellow beings may regard us.

**Minute 08-51.** Ian Harrington (Camb) clerk of P&SC brought us several concerns that have been seasoned during the week:

He asked us to consider this minute:

**Statement on the War in Iraq**

In our names, our government has pursued a war in Iraq, initially justified by falsehoods and subsequently rationalized as liberation. We are responsible for the deaths of many thousands of people. New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), mindful of its spiritual responsibility, finds itself compelled to speak out against the immoral actions of our government in the war in Iraq. We abhor the policies of the current administration and cannot be silent in the face of the injustice being perpetuated in our names. We call on fellow faith communities and individuals to join us in speaking publicly, in the pulpit and the streets, against the well-

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documented atrocities of our government, which violate our experience of the truth and the life to which we are called.

Friends approved this minute. We asked our clerk to send this minute to our elected representatives, ecumenical bodies, monthly meetings and Friends everywhere.

**Minute 08-52.** We then considered this minute on Peace:

**A Minute on Peace**

We live in a nation which spends more than the rest of the world combined on armed forces and armaments and which is now engaged in wars in two separate countries. The application of violence in these wars has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and injuries, incalculable material destruction, and a profound deterioration of the moral standing of our nation. As Friends and human beings we are deeply ashamed of the immense harm that our nation has inflicted on the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. We are disturbed that our national military and financial aid is so often employed abroad in support of powerful economic interests without regard for considerations of justice and self-determination for the people of other countries. In our own country, we witness daily the impoverishment of our social life – the deterioration of our infrastructure, the failures of our schools, and the inadequacy of our health care – resulting from the diversion of resources into armaments and war making.

When we confront the imperatives of the national security state, we recognize that fear, hatred, and insecurity of the citizens are exploited to generate consent for a so-called “war on terror” which has no defined goal and no foreseeable end. Neither a quest for revenge nor an unreasoning fear of the consequences of revenge against us, as embodied in the increasingly intrusive and repressive campaign for “homeland security” is admissible from a spiritual perspective. With the Psalmist, we say, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust. ‘Be still and know that I am God’”.

We reject all acts of terrorism, among which we include incursions and bombing by organized military forces that destroy homes and kill and maim innocents, however unintentionally. We do not support the “war on terror” and call for a reengagement in international governance and a major decrease of the military budget to generate a genuine peace dividend for desperately needed investments in infrastructure, education, health, and human services, and steps toward conservation and renewable energy sources.

We are mindful that Friends’ testimony on peace calls us “to root out the causes of war from our own lives and from the political and social structure about us.” We are urged to “seek, through God’s power and grace, to overcome in our own hearts the emotions that lie at the root of violence.” We seek, always, to live lives that testify to the presence of the divine Light in ourselves and every human being. We strive to overcome our own fears so that we can be centers of peace, a calming influence in an increasingly anxious world. We will remember what Jesus said, “Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest, and banish your fears.”

We, as a Yearly Meeting, call upon all our meetings to consider this minute during the coming year and to identify how to take action on the concerns raised. We also call on New England Friends to gather in a called Meeting for Worship in early 2009 to address the concerns raised in this minute.

Friends approved, asking that the minute be sent to monthly meetings.

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**Minute 08-53.** Peace & Social Concerns asked Friends to re affirm our 2006 minute on torture:

**Quaker Initiative Against Torture (QUIT) Minute**

New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends finds that torture is immoral, illegal and abhorrent. Torture — in wars, in prisons, and in homes — steals the humanity of the tortured, the torturer and those who have knowledge of it.

We believe in the sanctity of life, a faith that arises from our experience that there is that of God in everyone. This Light helps us to see our face in the stranger's face. Fear and denial cause us to forget our deep connections with one another. All human beings have the potential to be torturers as well as to be tortured. Only when we are willing to surrender to the Light, individually and corporately, can we eliminate the roots of torture.

Friends approved and directed the current committee to return with the best way to do this.

Please see minute 69 for the continuation of this business item.

**Minute 08-69.** Ian Harrington, clerk of Peace & Social Concerns committee returned with this recommendation:

New England Yearly Meeting asks the clerk to send letters including our minute 08-53 on torture urging the president and president-elect to end United States sponsored torture and dismantle the current administration's torture infrastructure. Given the urgency of this matter we further authorize Permanent Board to discern on our behalf whether to join the National Religious Campaign Against Torture and to endorse its executive order principles.

Friends approved.