

Dear Clerks and Friends,

*Who is my neighbor?*

The '04 Sessions attendance list included visitors from Kenya, Ramallah, Cuba, several U.S. yearly meetings, and many representatives of Friends organizations. The keynote helped us face racism within the Religious Society of Friends. Enclosed are the highlights of our sessions—it will take several months to prepare the minute book. If you did not attend the 2004 Annual Sessions, please take time to meet with someone in your monthly or quarterly meeting who did. It was a busy time. This letter and the accompanying minutes describe the concerns that Friends as individuals and as a corporate body have been, and continue to be, led to consider.

If I were to choose one phrase to currently describe NEYM it would be “change is in the air.” We are looking at and restating our vision of ourselves through the work of the *Faith and Practice* Revision Committee.

- ❶ In minute 04–34, you find what this committee presented to us. You have already received a mailing from this committee, but I want to re-emphasize your part in this process.

We approved minutes of appreciation and said goodbye to two long-term staff. We re-hired the new Camp Director, and hired Interim Young Friends and Christian Education Coordinators, and we approved a new Presiding clerk. We heard considerations of our stewardship of our home, camp and school as well as other “affiliated” Quaker programs and institutions in New England through the ad hoc Committee on Corporate Restructure

- ❷ Enclosed are minutes 04–18 and 04–30 that show our acknowledgment of the issues and reflect current thinking in the YM, action will come in the future.

Follow-up of our committee structure as suggested in the 2001 Long Range Planning Committee report, minute 01–42, has begun by an

- ❸ ad hoc Procedural Review Committee, as shown in minutes 04–18 and 04–19.
- ❹ Finance Committee presented a “stretch” budget which reflects the increases we requested during our '04 budget discussions: minutes 04–18 and 04–61.
- ❺ The Development Committee described ways “to insure adequate funding for the vision and ministry” of NEYM in minute 04–18 and 04–31. Several of our wider Quaker bodies have also asked that we increase our contributions to them.

As we began the 2005 budget discussion, a Friend reflected on this year's theme with her own query, "Am I your neighbor?" She was concerned that as a lesbian, the personnel policy of Friends United Meeting, of which we are a member, would bar her from holding a leadership role. After several drafts, we approved a Minute of Exercise.

- ⑥ Minute 04-74 is not an action minute, but one which describes our unity on this concern about the exclusion from leadership roles of non-celibate unmarried couples, whether they be heterosexual, gay or lesbian Friends. Also enclosed is a summary of Friends United Meeting's personnel policy.

Several committees brought minutes for our attention and discernment:

- ⑦ Minute 04-71 changed the name of the NE Friends Committee on Unity with Nature to Earthcare Ministry Committee and approved changes in their *Purposes and Procedures* to refocus their committee.
- ⑧ We united in principal with Racial, Social, & Economic Justice Committees' recommendation as regards the Freedmen's Fund in minute 04-75.

Along with envisioning a new job description to replace the current Youth & Education Secretary position, NEYM earlier established a "subcommittee for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse." Being that this is a continuing concern, several Friends attended and reported on a Safe Churches Conference

- ⑨ Minute 04-66 has included in it a full report by the attenders at this conference. For now I have enclosed portions of the report. Please review the minute book when it arrives at your meeting in January.

**Please bring these concerns to the appropriate committee or persons in your meeting, or at least post where your members and attenders can see what issues the Yearly Meeting is considering.**

Finally, I want to thank you and your monthly meeting members and attenders for the ways you supported me during my term as NEYM presiding clerk. I was supported through prayer, kind words, little gifts in passing, and yes, even through some pretty scathing reprimands in your evaluations as I refocused the business sessions onto the ongoing work of all our committees. I have been transformed by these past four years. Please be as faithful and loving to Christopher McCandless as you have been to me.

God bless you and keep you,

Deana Chase, Past Presiding Clerk