

To: The Permanent Board of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends  
From: Noah Merrill, Yearly Meeting Secretary  
Re: Report in preparation for PB meeting on February 15, 2020

*“It is a living ministry that begets a living people...”*

—Testimony to the life of John Banks, 1710

Dear Friends,

This meeting of the Permanent Board marks seven years since my first Permanent Board meeting in service as Yearly Meeting Secretary. Recognizing this milestone, I’ve been reflecting in recent weeks on our journey together since then. Seeking the guidance of the Spirit, trying to be faithful, we have embraced change in many ways in the last several years. I hope that we have grown in Love. My prayer as our journey continues is that we will embrace the challenges before us with faith, courage, vulnerability, and a willingness to be led—even and especially when we find ourselves in the wilderness.

With a focus on organizational matters, I’ve organized my written report for this meeting to begin with requests for Permanent Board approval, followed by updates. A separate report from the Working Group on NEYM Support for Ministry & Spiritual Life, which has been a key focus of my work, is included in the advance documents.

As I imagine many of you will be aware, there is an enormous amount happening among New England Quakers as this new year begins, including several exciting ways Friends serving through the Yearly Meeting are supporting the thriving of local meetings in new ways. I hope you all will be encouraged to regularly read the email newsletter and check the new website and events calendar for updates. As always, I would welcome the opportunity to speak to any specific questions you may have about wider work featured there, and I hope to offer some further reflections on how the Spirit is moving among us in my oral report.

### **Request for Approval: Document Retention and Destruction Policy**

Last year, Permanent Board approved a Data Use and Privacy Policy, available at [neym.org/who/governance/policies/data-privacy-policy](http://neym.org/who/governance/policies/data-privacy-policy). As part of this policy, two commitments were made that have now been realized.

The first was for the Yearly Meeting to add to our general liability insurance a level of coverage for cybersecurity and data breaches appropriate to our operations. **This coverage is now in place.**

The second was for the Yearly Meeting to create a policy on document retention destruction. Sara Hubner conducted research and drafted a policy, which is included in the advance documents for your review. In collaboration with our Accounts Manager Frederick Martin, and after consultation with our general counsel and others, we are bringing it forward for approval.

Normally a document essentially documenting the details of our procedures might not need to

be approved by the Board, but given the potential legal implications of document retention and destruction it seemed appropriate to seek this level of approval.

In light of this, I am asking the Permanent Board to **approve the proposed document retention and destruction policy** to guide our work.

**Request for Approval: Final Terms for Student Loan Forgiveness**

As a final step in laying down the student loan fund of New England Yearly Meeting, and as requested by Permanent Board in August last year, we are bringing forward a formal proposal for your approval outlining the terms by which the outstanding loans held as part of the Student Loan Fund will be forgiven. We are asking for **formal approval by Permanent Board for these terms in order to authorize the necessary action**. Please see the proposal in the advance documents for a memo from Accounts Manager Frederick Martin with further background.

Simply, with support from the Treasurer, my recommendation for approval in the minutes of Permanent Board is as follows:

*Permanent Board approves forgiving all outstanding student loans held by New England Yearly Meeting of Friends, effective 2/15/2020. Letters will be sent to all borrowers notifying them of this action.*

**Update: North Fairfield Meetinghouse**

Progress on resolution of the laying down of North Fairfield Meeting has been slow. As the new year began, I encouraged the scheduling of a meeting of Friends in the region of Vassalboro Quarter who have been involved in some way in the process; they met recently and reviewed the remaining tasks, which involve caring for the small number of Friends whose memberships have not yet been transferred or laid down; assessing and appropriately disposing of remaining items in the meetinghouse (including making sure appropriate items are transferred to the Archives); caring for the continued integrity and security of the building; and continuing the process of seeking a new owner for the property.

While many hands have been engaged in aspects of this work over the past two years, I have sought to affirm the interests of the Yearly Meeting in the process and to clarify the next needed steps. My hope is to be able to bring (or for others to bring) to Permanent Board, before the end of 2020, a proposal for the disposition (either sale or donation) of the property of the meetinghouse. If possible, I hope to participate in an on-site visit and workday being discussed for later this spring. I'm happy to provide further information if Friends are interested in particular details.

**Update: Mosher Book and Tract Fund**

In keeping with the new process for the use of this fund, Office Manager Sara Hubner and I have had a few conversations with Friends interested in projects that would benefit from this support. Ideas have included audiobooks featuring Friends reading early Quaker writings,

podcast interviews or videos with contemporary Friends telling their conviction stories, and original spiritual writing by New England Friends. No proposals have yet resulted from these conversations.

We are also looking forward to hearing more about the development of the project funded with approval from Permanent Board last August (funding for promotion of the Spanish translation of John Woolman's Journal) which has been delayed for several months but seems now to be getting underway again.

If you have ideas or suggestions for potential use of these funds, please share them with Sara Hubner at [office@neym.org](mailto:office@neym.org).

### **Update: Sabbatical Planning**

As Friends are aware, consistent with our personnel policy, I am preparing to take a sabbatical beginning this fall (2020), from approximately October 2020 to January 2021. In consultation with Coordinating & Advisory Committee and others, and consistent with the personnel policy, I intend to take two 3-month sabbatical leave periods, the second to occur the following year. I believe this will be better for the organization and for me, ensuring less disruption.

The details of the plan for coverage of my responsibilities is still taking shape, but I expect it will include the following:

- Concluding significant work to end the FY2020 fiscal year prior to my departure
- Delegating some of my responsibilities among a small number of people with appropriate skills and roles in NEYM, rather than to just one person; for example, delegating program oversight to one person
- Deferring some projects until after the sabbatical is complete
- Asking PB approval to give a designated person temporary authorization for banking/"signing"/approval duties
- Advance planning for contingencies to allow me to be fully out of contact during the sabbatical

I will continue to work with Coordinating & Advisory and the staff team to finalize sabbatical plans; I intend to share a more formal report/plan with the May meeting of the Permanent Board. I welcome your input and questions and look forward to working with many Friends to ensure, as much as I'm able, that the process goes smoothly, keeping interruptions to the ongoing work of Friends in New England to a minimum in my absence. I hope it will be an experience of growth and new perspective for all of us.

### **Other Updates**

- **New Youth Programs Trailer:** After an inspiring fundraising effort and an exhaustive search, we have purchased a new trailer for the Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) and Junior High Yearly Meeting (JHYM) programs. The cost for the trailer was within our planned range, combining budgeted expenses and restricted gifts given for this purpose over the past five months. A photo and thank-you from Coordinator Gretchen Baker-Smith will be

in the upcoming email newsletter, and the trailer will be on the road to meetings across New England very soon.

- **Retirement Accounts:** Each NEYM employee is eligible for a 403(b) individual retirement account as part of their service as staff. For years, NEYM’s accounts have been in the custody of VOYA, a large, mass-market financial investment services firm.

We are in the process of moving these accounts to Everence, the Mennonite financial services organization with which NEYM has a relationship in support of health care, planned giving, and other services. We expect this to provide improved customer service and financial counseling, to reduce fees overall, as well as offering the option, not available previously, for employees to choose socially responsible investment options consistent with their faith and values.

- **Group Exemption:** The process for setting up a *Group Exemption Number* for NEYM—which would be associated with the Tax IDs of local meetings throughout New England—continues. Working with a dedicated IRS case officer, we are making progress slowly, and expect a further response in the next few months. Many thanks to NEYM Accounts Manager Frederick Martin for his diligent and detail-focused work moving this work forward.

Once the initial registration is complete, we will reach out to all local meetings that are not yet associated with the new number to support them in the process of becoming associated. The purpose of this effort is to ensure that the tax exemption status of the YM and the local meetings aligns with current IRS preferences, and to reduce confusion and workload on the part of Friends stewarding the financial lives of their local meetings.

Among the many benefits of this transition, local meetings would be able to easily demonstrate their tax exempt status to businesses and donors without either needing to set up a separate 501(c)(3) incorporation or engaging in a time-consuming process of documentation. We will update the Board when the process is complete.

- **By-laws:** Several years ago, Permanent Board tasked a small working group to begin a process of drafting a proposed set of bylaws for NEYM as an organization. For several reasons, this work was delayed; it has not moved forward since then.

Our general counsel has previously advised us that, in the absence of formal by-laws, some portions of the text of the 1985 NEYM Faith and Practice, in addition to the articles of incorporation for NEYM in MA, RI, and ME, do serve this purpose, and have been used as the basis for filings with the IRS, etc. since then. In previous conversations, we have been advised to be “as clear as possible about as little as possible”, meaning that such by-laws should be simple and straightforward in outlining the basic governing articles, requirements, and roles.

Supported by counsel, I believe it would be relatively straightforward to bring forward a set of draft by-laws for seasoning and consideration for approval by the Yearly Meeting. I hope we might consider taking this next step when ready.

###

*And I said to him*

*Are there answers to all of this?*

*And he said*

*The answer is in a story  
and the story is being told.*

*And I said*

*But there is so much pain*

*And he answered*

*Pain will happen.*

*Then I said*

*Will I ever find meaning?*

*And he said*

*You will find meaning  
Where you give meaning.*

*The answer is in story  
And the story isn't finished.*

—Padraig O Tuama