

“It is a living ministry that begets a living people...”
- testimony to the life of John Banks, 1710

Background Working Paper

prepared by the
[Working Group on Support of Ministry and Spiritual Life](#)
to provide context and inform recommendations

Part I. An emerging vision of thriving

If we were successful in this work, what might thriving ministers, elders, and the spiritual life of local meetings look like? What evidence would we see that our work has been fruitful?

The articulation below seeks to affirm a vision that emerged during the Working Group’s process. We offer it as an **invitation to inspire our shared work** going forward, and a **horizon toward which we might journey** together:

Through the thriving of gifts in ministry¹ given to New England Friends, the Reign of Heaven would be more fully expressed in our region and in the wider world. As an essential part of our life together, Friends in New England would consistently and joyfully expect, recognize, call out, name, and nurture gifts in ministry. Friends would affirm and recognize a wide range of forms that ministry can take—including both expressions that primarily build up the spiritual life of the Religious Society of Friends, and those that primarily foster hope, inspiration, challenge, healing, and transformation in the wider world. Friends would be able to recognize that distinct expressions of ministry require distinct forms of support, nurture, and oversight, both at different stages of the ministry’s life and because of the distinct vocation to which each Friend is called.

Friends of diverse backgrounds, life stages and circumstances, and identities would serve in ministry. A recognition that growth in ministry is a *developmental* process—Friends can grow in their gifts through experience in faithful service over time—would be paired with an acknowledgement of the need for experimentation, risk-taking, and mentoring that lifts up the efforts of those less experienced alongside more seasoned Friends. Opportunities to explore support of and service in ministry would be accessible and widely-known to Friends throughout our region.

¹ For a working definition of *ministry* used for the purposes of the working group’s charge, see Part 2: Context, Background, and Analysis.

Because of their participation in their local meetings—and those meetings’ capacity to support ministry—Friends would have a clearer sense of their own gifts and the gifts of others in their meetings, and of how they work together in the ministry of the whole. Celebration and recognition of gifts in one person would be seen as a blessing to the whole community. Meetings would understand their role and responsibility in stewardship of the gifts in their members, and members would understand their responsibility to be faithful in the exercise of their gifts for the good of the meeting community and the world.

People both inside Friends communities and beyond would identify the nurture and oversight of ministry as a core element of what it means to practice the Quaker tradition. Friends called to ministry would be challenged to greater boldness and fuller expression of their gifts, and would be able to receive healthy oversight that realigns or corrects their course when they are outrunning their Guide. Humility, courage, and reverence would be evident in Friends’ exercise of ministry. The life of Friends communities would bear witness to the infinite Love of God.

Part 2. Context, Background and Analysis

A Working Definition of Ministry

In approaching this work, it has been helpful to be clear on a shared definition of “ministry.”

New England Friends use the term “ministry” in many ways. Examples range from the highly specific (“vocal ministry” referring to led speech in meeting for waiting worship) to the more institutional (a program of the organization of the Yearly Meeting is sometimes called a “ministry”) to the most broad (any action taken by Quakers, whether acknowledged as arising from a sense of leading on the part of the individual involved or not). Some Friends also speak of “a ministry” to describe the consistent body of work/religious service of a particular Friend over a sustained period of time. Each of these uses serves a purpose in a particular context.

For the purposes of *this* work, we have found helpful the following definition from Callid Keefe-Perry of Fresh Pond (MA) Meeting (whose service is under the care of that meeting):

Ministry = Actively Stewarding Gift(s) of X for Service beyond oneself
Stewarding = Sustained Intention, Prayerful Attention, and Guided Action
Gifts = Prophetic² Speech, Prophetic Action, Healing, Eldership, etc.

² “Prophetic”, in this context, may be understood to refer to both articulating (speech) and embodying (action) the vision and expression of God’s inbreaking Reign in the world (a world of justice, liberation, healing, wholeness, and joy). In Friends’ tradition, “prophetic ministry” characterizes the fundamental motion of inspired speech in the meeting for worship, in which those who speak seek to be channels for

While “corporate” ministry happens in many forms, we believe it is helpful for these purposes to focus on the *person* as the channel through whom the gifts are expressed, supported by the community, for the good of the whole. Each individual is part of a wider ecology of faithfulness, but it is at the place where the individual brings forth the gifts they’ve been given to steward that it’s possible to observe the *ministry happening*. Ministry at its most fruitful happens by the action of *gifts* expressed through *people*, stewarded and grounded in worshipping *communities*.

With this in mind, we could consider the relative *effectiveness* of New England Friends’ forms and practices “for supporting ministry and spiritual life” through the lens of whether they bear fruit in more (both more *fully* and greater *quantity*) faithful exercise of gifts by individuals for the good of the local meeting, the wider community and the world.

Friends sometimes use the term “ministry” to describe work directed toward Quaker communities, and the word “witness” to describe work more focused on non-Quakers, including organizing, activism, service, or advocacy.

For the purposes of this work, we are choosing to encompass *both of these kinds of activity* under the heading of “ministry”, recognizing that what unites these categories is not the context in which the work is done, but *the ground from which the work arises, the stewardship of the call, and the accompaniment, reflection, and faithfulness that is needed* so that the gifts can be fully expressed.

We believe this way of understanding ministry is consistent with the definition above. While different expressions of ministry need different kinds of care in some particular ways³, at the root we believe they need similar tending, if Friends are to be faithful.

We also know that, for many Friends, the work of nurturing ministry and spiritual life is inextricably connected to, and distinct from, the exercise of spiritual gifts in *eldership*—Friends’ tradition of spiritual midwifery, encouragement, discernment, and prayerful holding of both individuals and the wider community. We see (drawing on diverse perspectives among Friends deeply engaged in reclaiming eldership for our times) that we can view eldership as both an

the immediate inbreaking of the power of the Spirit into the particular context in place, relationship, and time. Prophetic ministry includes criticizing and energizing that helps people to move from oppression to right relationship, that dismantles systems and structures of injustice and empowers liberation and wholeness.^a

³ In this work, we have especially heard the need for Friends to give attention to nurturing gifts in “preaching” (Spirit-led vocal ministry) and “teaching” (religious education, spiritual formation, and training in Quaker spiritual practices and disciplines) at this time. This is not because these kinds of gifts are in an absolute sense more valuable than other gifts, but because thriving ministry in these areas is an essential part of nurturing the spiritual life of local meetings and the ministry of the whole body. We hope this guidance, reinforced by many voices in our work, will be heeded and taken to heart going forward.

essential kind of ministry, as well as a distinct form of spiritual service and giftedness in its own right.

In the darkest days of World War II in Europe, theologian Simone Weil took the position that the value of “collectivities” (institutions or groups of people acting from a shared identity) must be judged by their effect on *actual human beings*, on bodies and souls. She warned of the tendency, present among Friends as with other humans, to become lost in abstractions, or understandings of “how it should be done” rather than focusing on *what is actually happening* and *what fruits that activity bears*. We have sought to focus our attention on shifting from abstraction to concrete fruits, and from theory to practice.

Whatever work we do as Friends, we bring our best intentions. This is a moment for us to examine the current fruits of our work supporting ministry, and to ask how we might make changes that could encourage a more nourishing and vibrant harvest.

This Work in Context

In 2015, after many years of discernment and labor⁴, Annual Sessions (re)affirmed that the core purpose of the organization of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends is to support the thriving of local Friends meetings and the web of relationships in which they are held.

We were particularly moved and challenged by these words from the 2015 report, “We Need a Plan”:

We envision a growing network of transformative, witnessing local faith communities in the Friends tradition across New England

We have sought to be accountable, and to help Friends respond, to this vision through the nurture of gifts in ministry.

Since 2015, changes in structure, budget, staffing, culture, and practice have sought to help Friends live into this renewed commitment and direction. The fruits are being felt in the witness of new life.

Our work as this ad hoc working group has sought to build on this work and discernment⁵, and to ask how changes to NEYM’s structures and practices in support of ministry and spiritual life might help us more fully align with this core purpose and this vision. In offering this working paper and the recommendations of the working group, we recognize that we are participating in a much wider, integrated, and ongoing process. We hope the recommended changes will contribute to the thriving of the whole.

⁴ Including the work of the Structural Review Committee, Long Term Financial Planning Committee, Procedural Review Committee, and many others over several decades

⁵ Building on the work of the Clerking Practices and Structures Working Group

How Ministry is Now Supported among New England Quakers

Across New England, much good and faithful work is being done and has been done to support ministry. And yet there are also significant gaps between what we say we do, or hope to do, and the relative level of effectiveness or fruitfulness of that work.

In some cases, our formal processes are clear, but are inactive or rarely used (the process of recording gifts in ministry is one example). In others, there is a lack of clarity about where agency and responsibility lie, and this leaves crucial gaps unfilled, or blocks the flow of the Spirit among us.

Here is how primary support for ministry is happening at this time:

1. **Informally through relationships** among Friends active in public ministry, or those with experience supporting them (both within a given meeting, or more commonly crossing the boundaries of a given local meeting, quarter, or even yearly meeting). Periodically, these informal connections have been supported through one or more intentional invitations to gather, organized by a particular Friend or small group of Friends who feel led to do so.

These relationships have often formed through shared service in ministry, through personal connections initially made at **wider Friends gatherings** (FWCC, FGC, FUM, or NEYM Sessions), or through participation in **spiritual formation or ministry programs** (such as the School of the Spirit, **Nurturing Faithfulness**, etc.) *This is a primary way ministry is currently supported among New England Quakers.*

2. **Local meetings** (formally through **support/oversight/care/accountability committees**, informally through worship, spiritual friendships, and mutual encouragement). This is an active part of the work of a growing number of local meetings in New England. In many others, there is not a culture or experience of intentional support of ministry in this way; in some, there is hostility. Several support, oversight, care, and/or accountability committees include members from beyond the ministering Friend's home meeting. In some small meetings, individual Friends or the meeting as a whole might serve some of these functions of support, oversight, accountability, etc. In the meetings served by pastors, there is often support and guidance for pastors from the local meeting's ministry & counsel committee, or by a distinct committee for this purpose.
3. **Quarterly Meetings** are charged by Faith & Practice with endorsing travel minutes and recording gifts in ministry. In most quarters, travel minutes, when brought from local meetings, are received and endorsed as an understood practice, though later follow-up or reporting back happens far less frequently. The practice of recording gifts in ministry

is currently very rare, and is not an active or widely-understood practice in any quarter. It is receiving new interest in some local and quarterly meetings. Some quarterly meetings have funds (Salem Quarter is the most active example, Sandwich Quarter and others have funds as well) that are used to make grants that can support Friends in public ministry.

4. The **NEYM Committee on Ministry & Counsel** has periodically contributed to, or formally sponsored, programming and events to support ministry (a recent example is the “sponsorship” of the Women in Public Ministry Conference and its successor, “At the Well”. These were funded by the Legacy Gift Committee, and organized and led independently by Friends from New England and elsewhere).

The Ministry & Counsel Committee is formally charged with nurturing and caring for (in support of local meetings) Friends in public ministry, including those with travel minutes endorsed by the Yearly Meeting. While there have been significant and important efforts in recent years to clarify, prepare for, and raise awareness of this responsibility, it has not yet been robustly taken up.

This work has been inconsistent, the needs sometimes not being clearly understood, the skills for doing so not being well-developed, the responsibility at times vague, and the implementation frequently challenging.

5. The **Permanent Board** of the Yearly Meeting is [charged with endorsing travel minutes](#) forwarded by quarters for travel beyond the Yearly Meeting, and then sending notification to **Ministry & Counsel**, which is responsible for follow-up and ongoing care (though there have been few examples of this process happening fully since a new procedure was approved two years ago). Permanent Board is charged to receive and consider endorsements of completed travel in ministry.

While there have been significant and important efforts in recent years to clarify this process, it has not yet been widely implemented.

When this has happened in the past few years, it has mostly happened in writing, though there have also been in-person reports and reflections by the travelers at meetings of the PB, by invitation of the Clerk of the Permanent Board.

6. **Friends serving as Yearly Meeting Staff**, especially the YM Secretary and Quaker Practice and Leadership Facilitator (QPLF), have regular contact with Friends serving in public ministry, offering support and collaborating on **programmatic events** (such as retreats, workshops, and trainings).

Staff have played leading roles in several recent one-time events focusing on support of ministry, and engage in ongoing mentoring and accompaniment, including

“mentor-matchmaking” and engaging local meeting leadership or disparate Friends to create support and oversight committees for those with emerging calls to ministry.

The YM Secretary annually co-leads retreats for pastors from both New England and New York Yearly Meetings, as well as related opportunities for those who hold the whole of their local meetings. Through **visitation** and **correspondence**, the YM Secretary and Quaker Practice and Leadership Facilitator (along with other staff and other Friends) encounter and encourage Friends serving in (or at the edge of considering serving in) public ministry, often supporting ministers’ evolving journeys in various ways over the course of several years. The staff have also played a key role in developing, supporting, and envisioning next steps for the *Nurturing Faithfulness* program, a partnership with Marcelle Martin, Hilary Burgin, Woolman Hill, and New England Yearly Meeting.

7. The **NEYM Legacy Gift Committee** provides substantial funding in support of ministering Friends. At times, other YM Committees have offered support or accompaniment to Friends serving under those auspices or in contexts specific to the work of that Committee; a particularly active example is the **Puente de Amigos Committee**, which (in partnership with the local meeting and other bodies) has care for clearness, support, and preparation for Friends traveling in the ministry to Cuba Yearly Meeting as representatives of New England Friends.
8. **The youth and young adult retreat programs of the Yearly Meeting** (generally speaking, mostly weekend retreats with between 20-40 youth participants, accompanied by adult staff) foster the gifts of volunteer staff and facilitators/presenters, as well as nurturing the gifts of children and youth participants . This has been and is an important way that Friends (particularly youth and younger adults) are supported in discovering their gifts and taking risks to grow in their exercise. This is an area where this dimension of the work of supporting ministry could be strengthened and made more explicit, and to help connect this work with the service of youth ministers in local meetings.

Origins of Forms Supporting Ministry Among Friends

In Friends tradition, experience, and theology, spiritual gifts are understood as given to the community by God through each particular person for service in the world. This has been a foundational understanding since the beginnings of the Religious Society of Friends, and has its roots in the primitive Christianity on which early Friends built their movement.

In the early years of the Quaker movement, the cultivation and stewardship of gifts in ministry was supported by mutual mentoring and encouragement among Friends active in ministry, and (slightly later) by participation in the “second day meeting”, a gathering of Friends active in

public ministry, for worship, coordination, and reflection. This was a primary locus of support for ministering Friends—for mentoring, for apprenticeship, and for encouragement.

As the movement grew and stabilized, this form eventually evolved into the local meetings of ministers and elders, the ancestors of contemporary committees (meetings) for Ministry & Counsel/Ministry & Worship.

Historically in New England and elsewhere (and in some meetings today), these meetings were understood to constitute, not a “committee” of the monthly meeting, but a *separate meeting of Friends* charged with caring for the ministry and spiritual life of Friends in that local area, who would meet regularly (the “monthly meeting *on* ministry and counsel”). These meetings at the local level also sent Friends to constitute the “quarterly meeting on ministry and counsel”, which would in turn appoint Friends (some or all of its participants) to constitute the “yearly meeting on ministry and counsel”.

Historically, this “yearly meeting of ministers and elders” was an actual event that took place annually, prior to the annual sessions of the Yearly Meeting, and included Friends serving as part of the quarterly (and so, monthly) meetings on ministry and counsel throughout New England. In time, a key role of this meeting for worship and business was the creation of a reflection on the spiritual condition of the body as a whole⁶ (later, the *State of Society* report), which would then (along with any concerns or guidance felt appropriate) be forwarded to the annual sessions of the Yearly Meeting for consideration and, if appropriate, action.

Origins of Current Forms and Practices

Following the reunification of Friends in New England in 1945, the historical form of the *Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Counsel* (recognizing some differences between the Gurneyite YM and the Wilburite YM) was mostly preserved, though it faced increasing challenges in accomplishing the work with which it was entrusted.

By the mid 1960s, Friends recognized that they were in the midst of many changes: in the wider society; in the culture, lifestyle, and background of active Friends; in perspectives among sometimes divergent Quaker constituencies (a dynamic strengthened by the reunification of the disparate Friends groups in New England); and in the practices of both local meetings and the Yearly Meeting.

The recognition of these transformations prompted the Yearly Meeting to make alterations in the forms for supporting ministry, with the goal of improving function. Some of those changes served a valuable purpose in their time. And yet, something important was lost in this process.

⁶ In the Wilburite YM, the reflection on the spiritual condition took a different form, including written responses to the queries at the monthly meeting level, and a clerk’s reflection, rather than a formal “state of society” report.

Minutes of the Yearly Meeting and other contemporary documents tell an illuminating story. As a result of the work of an ad hoc *Quarterly Meeting Study Group* in the late 1960s and early 1970s, several changes in the structure and function of the Yearly Meeting were made, including a change in how members of the YM Finance and Nominating Committees were appointed, and a similar but more profound shift in how the work of supporting ministry and spiritual life was approached.

A basic guiding theme of these several changes was that, because of an apparent assessment that quarterly meetings were unable to effectively perform certain functions, responsibilities previously held by quarterly meetings were reassigned to monthly meetings, or to the Yearly Meeting.

The effects of these changes remain. The Finance Committee is no longer appointed by local meetings, the YM having recognized the importance of an integrated nominating process for Friends with appropriate skills and expertise. The Nominating Committee continues the practice of being constituted by monthly meeting appointments in form, in part, but few monthly meetings appoint representatives in practice. In the case of the Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Counsel, the changes in form and practice were especially significant.

To summarize the changes related to Ministry & Counsel:

Based on an apparent assessment that quarterly meetings were not successful/did not have the capacity to nurture ministry, spiritual life, and local meetings⁷, several steps were taken:

- Over a period of years, the *Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Counsel* was laid down, ending the practice of a distinct annual gathering to support ministry and spiritual life and create the State of Society report
- Around the same time, a new *Meetings and Extension Committee* was created, charged with supporting the creation of new meetings, fostering the health of existing meetings, and encouraging intervisitation (this built on the previous “church extension and evangelism” work in the former Gurneyite YM)
- A new *NEYM Committee on Ministry & Counsel* was created, to meet regularly during the year and to include representatives to be directly appointed by all monthly meetings (removing the quarterly meetings from the process).

⁷ While these functions were in theory transferred to the new Committee on Ministry and Counsel, the language in Faith and Practice (1985) relating to the responsibilities of quarterly meetings does not appear to have been revised to fully reflect this change. Some responsibilities of caring for ministry remain the responsibility of quarters, some are given to NEYM M&C, and some still seem to overlap. This inconsistency in Faith and Practice, and (perhaps relatedly) Friends’ conceptual understanding of the work, has led to persistent confusion and fear of overstepping or usurping the authority of one body or another, and has impaired the efforts of either (quarterly meetings or Ministry & Counsel Committee) to make further advances in the work. This lack of clarity and confusion has also been a key factor inhibiting the function and health of quarterly meetings overall.

- The *Meetings and Extension Committee* struggled to begin its work in this new context, expressing concerns about being daunted by the scope of its charge, and burdened by the challenge of organizing and coordinating visitation and support for meetings. This work proved more difficult than expected for a committee to accomplish.
- By the end of the several-year process, the decision had been made to merge the charges of the Meetings and Extension Committee with the new Yearly Meeting Committee on Ministry and Counsel, further increasing the scope of the overall work assigned to the one resulting Committee.
- Early reports of the Committee on Ministry & Counsel expressed concerns that care for meetings, outreach, and intervisitation were felt to be beyond the capacity of the Committee, or reflected that other concerns such as offering workshops at Annual Sessions and elsewhere, or caring for individuals who felt unwelcome at Sessions, were taking priority over these concerns.
- A report from 1972 (soon after the creation of the new Committee) mentions that fully one quarter of representatives actually appointed by local meetings had *never* attended meetings of the Committee, and that 16 meetings had *never* appointed representatives at all. Over the course of the two gatherings held in the previous year, the composition of meetings was approximately 50% consistent (meaning that fully *half of the group was different* each time).
- While there have been notable exceptions and periods of healthy activity, design problems relating to composition and scope, visible in the earliest reports of this “working” committee, **have persisted until the present**, as have the challenges of giving sufficient, sustained, skilled attention to fostering the growth of new meetings, caring for the health of existing meetings, caring for those serving in ministry, and engaging in outreach.

These above changes taken together resulted in the creation of the current form of the **Committee on Ministry and Counsel of New England Yearly Meeting**.

Obstacles Presented by Current Forms and Practices

Several of the concerns identified below are highlighted in the recent report of the [Clerking Practices and Structures Working Group](#)⁸, whose recommendations resulted in the creation of this Working Group on Yearly Meeting Support of Ministry and Spiritual Life. Those articulations may be helpful to reference.

⁸ The Clerking Practices and Structures Working Group was itself informed by the previous work of many other Friends over many years (as well as by new interviews and analysis), including the Structural Review and Long Term Financial Planning Committees, to name two, as well as the direct guidance of Sessions—concerns about inclusive leadership development arising from Sessions 2018 led to the Clerking Practices and Structures Working Group’s formation.

It's important to acknowledge again that much good and fruitful work has been done by Friends serving as members of NEYM Ministry & Counsel in the past 50 years. In particular, through the leadership of particular Friends, groundbreaking publications (*Living With Ourselves and Others*, *Faithful Sexuality*) have been created, and deeply challenging pastoral care situations and conflicts have been addressed with tenderness, courage, and profound compassion. Many Friends have also found the experience of service through Ministry & Counsel personally enriching, and spiritual friendships among members of M&C have been deeply nourishing.

The observations that follow are not intended to diminish that work or those experiences in any way, but to foster insight into how obstacles to further faithful work might be removed, and how the flourishing of ministry might be more fully supported today.

Again, the Ministry & Spiritual Life Working Group offers its gratitude to the many faithful Friends who have shared their gifts, time, energy, and prayerful devotion through the work of Ministry & Counsel over many decades. We are deeply grateful for the faithfulness, labor and devotion of countless Friends past and present, which has brought the Yearly Meeting to where Friends find ourselves today, as we consider new horizons in this vital work.

Observations and Obstacles

1. The current charge (Purposes, Procedures, and Composition) of the Committee on Ministry and Counsel is extremely broad and varied in scope and function, and current practices of organization aren't optimal to perform these various functions
 - a. An example of this: At a given daylong, large-group meeting, there may be a need to both share news and resources for supporting local meetings with Friends attending M&C for the first time AND to focus on detailed and ongoing discernment relating to controversial—and perhaps seemingly arcane—NEYM policy. This often makes it difficult to accomplish either task well.
2. The independent appointment of most members of the Committee by local meetings, rather than through an integrated nominating process, has several effects that can be challenging.

This approach:

- a. Poses a barrier to consistent participation (a different constellation of people is often present at each meeting throughout the year)
- b. At the same time that the composition of the group changes frequently, because many Friends serve as representatives from their meetings without term limits, there can be a tendency for some part of the group to remain the same over many years, leading to, at times, both a sense of constant transition *and* a challenge in embracing new perspectives due to entrenched attitudes or a perception of “knowing how it is” among some (even when conditions have changed over time)

- c. Diminishes a sense of responsibility (there are so many people, and roles aren't differentiated; absences are frequent)
 - d. Can result in a misalignment of the gifts and experience of those appointed with the gifts needed for the work before the Committee
 - e. Can create a situation in which disruptive or harmful behavior on the part of some participants is more difficult to address, since group membership is "porous", and appointees from local meetings can feel little accountability to the Yearly Meeting for their participation. The YM can exercise limited discipline if the MM has appointed the person, and doesn't feel a responsibility for the behavior or service of their appointee
 - f. Can mean that since monthly meetings often find the request to appoint members to NEYM M&C burdensome, many people are in fact self-nominated, since local meetings are often happy to approve a willing volunteer
 - g. Means it is very difficult for a group that theoretically consists of 70+ members to develop a sense of mutual accountability, cohesion, and "team" functioning, especially when fewer than half of those theoretical members are appointed or attend meetings
 - h. Because of the varying understandings of the role of appointees (on the part of those appointed and the local meetings or nominators appointing Friends), relatively few members understand themselves as being responsible for ongoing work between meetings; there can be a tendency to see the already-significant commitment to attend all-day Saturday meetings five times a year as the majority of the work they are able/expecting to offer
3. There is a desire and an expectation (on the part of many attending) for "open space" (meaning both available time and attention) for worship and for prayerful engagement with whatever concerns may arise at the time of the meeting, BUT the Committee/Clerk is also required to respond to a long list of detailed activities and issues throughout the year, most of which require substantial consultation, decision-making, experience, planning, promotion, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up.
 4. The significant programmatic dimension of some aspects of the work understood to be (at least partially) under the purview of Ministry & Counsel (trainings, workshops, retreats) requires specific gifts and skills which may not be present on the Committee at any given time (see #1). Also, the provision of high-quality programming would benefit from greater continuity of planning and support. Little learning or institutional memory is possible for the Committee as a whole given the inconsistency of attendance, and the turnover of members.
 5. It *is* clear that the current model/practice responds to a real and substantial need on the part of many Friends (some of whom have been long-time attenders of these meetings) for spiritual friendship, rich worship, and social connection. If the current form were changed, it is important to recognize that the absence of this way of meeting this need,

unless addressed in another way, would be keenly felt by some Friends.

6. The practice of holding four regular daylong meetings throughout the year (regardless of the type or quantity of business) in addition to a meeting at Annual Sessions shifts the focus of energy and attention toward *the event of the meeting itself*, rather than the meeting(s) happening in order *to plan and prepare for or to reflect on the ongoing work* being done outside the meetings. This approach to meetings, and the tendency to presume that work being done by the Committee should/must be planned and conducted by members of Ministry & Counsel, limits the gifts and perspectives available for the work of supporting ministry and spiritual life, and raises significant obstacles to participation by many Friends, including especially younger adults and families with small children.
7. The perception (articulated by some Friends) that Ministry & Counsel Committee “owns” or is “THE place for” support for ministry and spiritual life in the Yearly Meeting, and exercises the only appropriate authority to approve and be central to such efforts, tends to foster and reinforce a sense of superiority and “one right way” on the part of the members of the Committee and beyond, and creates a substantial deterrent to new approaches being shared and developed.

This perception also does not align with the current reality, where many others have responsibilities for spiritual nurture, religious education, pastoral care, and other service overlapping with the current charge of Ministry & Counsel.

Some Friends engaged in public ministry outside of M&C—including some Friends who have served as members of M&C—express concerns that the structure of M&C can be experienced as “controlling”, a roadblock to new initiatives or expressions of ministry. Because of this, these Friends often either refrain from embarking on new efforts to support ministry, or conduct such efforts independently (and indeed, intentionally don’t share them) out of fear that they will be “stifled.”

When those who are frustrated undertake these efforts independently, they sometimes do so without benefitting from integration or coordination with others charged with the care of ministry and spiritual life by the Yearly Meeting.

From one perspective, this sense of the “primacy” or exclusivity of the role of the M&C Committee could be seen as a reflection of—and a quality reinforcing—what some have come to understand and articulate as “white supremacy culture.”

8. Because there is little outside accountability for the work of Ministry and Counsel (including both mechanisms of accountability to local meetings, and to the wider Yearly Meeting), because of a culture of “niceness” (doing what avoids conflict and keeps things comfortable, rather than raising difficult issues in a loving and direct way), and

because the measure of the success of an activity is often judged by whether those who led or organized it were pleased with it, **both the quality and the focus of the work have at times suffered.**

The cultural practice of tending to ask for feedback exclusively from attenders of committee meetings of Ministry & Counsel (asking those who are present at in-person meetings five times per year) limits the opportunity for listening directly to those we most desire to serve (in local meetings or those serving in public ministry), and can be a barrier to making timely and responsive adjustments.

9. Because the Committee is seen by some as “representative” of the whole Yearly Meeting, there is a tendency to believe that activities in a given area of work described by those in attendance are all that is happening, and to base decisions on this limited perspective.

This therefore partial knowledge, coupled with a sense of primacy of the role of the Committee and an absence of some needed skills and gifts, has at times formed a poor basis for fruitful action. We suggest that it is not loving or realistic to presume that Friends participating in the structure as currently constituted can maintain a “complete picture” of the activities and condition of Friends in the many areas of responsibility with which the Ministry & Counsel Committee is charged.

10. Organizing and providing four+ daylong meetings annually requires significant energy, volunteer and staff time, and other resources. It is worth considering how the carbon, energy, time, and money involved in these meetings could be more fruitfully stewarded or employed in support of visits to local meetings, workshops, connections with those serving in public ministry, preaching and teaching, etc.

*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity;
but of power, love, and discipline.*

- 2 Timothy 1-7