



NEW ENGLAND  
YEARLY MEETING  
— OF FRIENDS —  
QUAKERS

## INFORMATION FOR FIRST-TIME ATTENDERS

“Yearly Meeting” refers both to the Annual Sessions and the year-round organization. New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM) is the oldest yearly meeting in the world, dating from 1661 when Friends gathered in Newport, Rhode Island, and continues to meet annually. Friends first arrived in New England in 1656, four years after George Fox began his ministry in England.

The Yearly Meeting holds Annual Sessions once a year in August. During the rest of the year, important decisions that can't wait for the next Annual Sessions are handled by the Permanent Board, a large board with wide representation from all parts of New England.

The purposes of Yearly Meeting Sessions are worship, business, and fellowship.

### WORSHIP

Yearly Meeting can be a somewhat different experience from our home meetings. We hear new voices and experience new forms. There are many worship opportunities, programmed and unprogrammed: early morning worship, First Day worship, brief periods of worship following scheduled speakers and during business meeting, and as worship in smaller “Reflection Groups.”

### BUSINESS

Our business meetings are also meetings for worship. Each year we conduct the essential business of the Yearly Meeting, including hearing reports from committees which have been working through the year and discerning our way forward. We also hear concerns brought to the gathered body from the life of the Yearly Meeting. Items may come to annual Sessions through quarterly meetings, through standing committees of the Yearly Meeting, or from other Friends organizations. Other business matters include writing epistles (letters of greeting to the wider Quaker world) and hearing reports from our staff.

Business meetings are under the care of our clerks: the Presiding Clerk, two Recording Clerks and two Reading Clerks. The clerks are recommended by the Permanent Board and appointed by the Yearly Meeting.

Nearly a third of those attending Yearly Meeting are children and young people. Three age groupings (Junior Yearly Meeting, entering grades K through 6; Junior High Yearly Meeting, entering grades 7 through 9; and Young Friends, entering grade 10 through graduating high-school seniors) hold their own parallel yearly meetings on campus, appoint officers, take minutes, and write epistles. Young Adult Friends (ages 18 to 35), while part of the adult Yearly Meeting and often serving as volunteers, also take the time to meet separately. Parents or accompanying adults are responsible for the younger children when they are not in regular programs. Pre-K childcare is offered during the day, and volunteers are needed to help out!

Parents have to make arrangements among themselves for childcare at other times so they can attend meeting events.

### **SESSIONS IS ALSO A RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE**

NEYMs annual Sessions also have the features of a conference and a family camp, with workshops, talks, Anchor Groups, and recreation. Much happens at Sessions, and we are not expected to do everything that is on the schedule! Some of us have been known to disappear for afternoon naps.

Take some time to look at the **exhibits** of the work of Friends organizations and institutions. The scope of activity may be surprising and enlarge your knowledge of our Quaker world. Artists also have an exhibit.

**The Bookstore** is a wonderful feature of Yearly Meeting. A committee of volunteers organizes a large selection of Quaker and related books for sale, sent on consignment by Quaker booksellers and publishers. There are actually two bookstores: a General Bookstore and a Children's Bookstore. You may want to purchase something for your meeting and first day school. There are also some popular craft items for sale.

**Program activities include** Bible Half-Hour, Plenaries, and Reflection Groups. The Sessions program is planned by the Sessions Planning Committee, beginning the previous fall with careful consideration of evaluation comments and suggestions submitted by those attending the Sessions.

**Bible Half Hour:** Each year someone is invited to give a series of half-hour talks based on Biblical themes and references; this year it takes place Saturday through Wednesday.

More detailed information is printed in the ***Yearly Meeting News***, which is available each morning at breakfast (and on Friday when you register). You can also find it at the **Information Desk**, which has a variety of useful materials and volunteers who will be able to answer most questions about programming and logistics, as well as suggest

additional resources to learn more details about the Yearly Meeting. The Lost and Found is also located at the Information Desk.

**Staffing:** NEYM currently has eight full- or part-time staff throughout the year, including those that coordinate our youth programs and manage the office and communications. The most visible staff during our Annual Sessions are Noah Baker Merrill, the Yearly Meeting Secretary; and Elizabeth Hacala, the Events Coordinator, who have overall responsibility for the arrangements for Sessions. During Sessions, a number of people fill temporary staff positions to coordinate various aspects of the programming and logistics. The staff is supported by a large number of volunteers serving on committees throughout the year and assisting with a variety of tasks during Sessions.

**Hybrid Participation:** This year a number of programs will be offered simultaneously in person and on Zoom. Anyone registered for Sessions has access to the links

**Getting Your Bearings:** The Castleton University campus is divided into two parts. The dormitories, dining hall, campus safety, pavilion, and youth programs are all held on one side of South Street. The general bookstore, most anchor groups, and most programming are held on the other side of the campus. Maps of the campus are available at the Info Desk and online.