

## Sessions Planning

Sessions planning always begins with a look backwards at the previous year. In 2022 we held our first hybrid meeting at Castleton. From the Covid safety point of view, it was a perfect year with no cases at Sessions and none reported afterwards. From a hybrid point of view, while the Tech Team was amazing, we could see areas where better communication with the online community would have made a better experience. This year we have an online experience coordinator who is embedded in the planning process and will be very active at Castleton during Sessions. Deeper consideration of the contra dance has led us to turn that night into a broader themed 'block party' that we believe will be more inclusive of all interests at Sessions (and a lot of fun).

The reorganization of the large, monolithic Planning Committee into five focused teams is now in its second year. In my experience, the five team approach has been a success with clear lines of responsibility for almost all planning activities. I could go on about the many ways that I have seen these teams work long hours and struggle faithfully to create plans for Sessions. Just one small example: the Theme and Speakers Team has historically been focused on getting speakers for a single year's program. But this year the Team took it upon itself to begin considering the advantages of multi-year planning for speakers. This would help provide more continuity and would allow us to consider popular speakers whose calendars have very long lead-times. This wasn't in the Team's mandate but they saw a way to make Sessions better, and they pursued it. I see this dedication over and over again in the professional staff and in others in positions of responsibility for planning.

Before starting as clerk of Sessions planning, I had the impression that the planning was the key to making Sessions a success. The more work I do in planning, the more my view is changing. While planning is absolutely necessary, and insufficient planning will ruin the experience, the real heart of a successful annual gathering is in the attenders who reach out and give their gifts to us all; from the bookstore to the healing center to the golf carts; from people who make the tech work possible to the dozens of elders deepening worship and meetings for business; and especially the youth staff volunteers who nurture the life blood of our future gatherings; you are the beating heart of New England Yearly Meeting.

It has been a good year and I look forward to the fruits of our labor in August.

Phillip Veatch, clerk