

I am always amazed at the continual striving in our yearly meeting to self-renew, to keep those forms that support the work and worship of Friends and to let go of those forms that no longer meet our needs. This takes courage and trust, characteristics that I have found in abundance amongst the staff and volunteers who have worked all year on our annual gathering. A planning session held early in the fall of 2023 produced a detailed calendar of events coordinating all of the tasks that the various planning teams needed to accomplish. In hindsight, this road map was a tremendous success in bringing together the exact sets of people who were needed to season different tasks and avoid the burnout that comes from having too many people in meetings that they don't really need to be in.

A major focus this year has been thinking about how we create the vast pool of volunteers who make Sessions possible. Because we have such a dedicated and skilled staff working for the Yearly Meeting, I feel it is easy to slip into the expectation that Sessions is something that is done for the attendees, when instead the life of our Yearly Meeting depends on us all acting on the understanding that Sessions is something that we must *make* ourselves. During the past year, many “volunteering deep-dive” meetings were held in which we considered the questions: Why do people say yes when asked to help at Sessions? What gets in the way of saying yes? Can we make the asking a more widely spread responsibility and not lay it all on individual program leaders? In response to these queries, several innovative approaches were created, with more work planned in the future.

This is likely to be our last year at Castleton. Let us enjoy and celebrate all that this site has given to us. And as we search for new paths, let us strive to be gentle with each other, remembering that the words of the Holy Spirit comes to us through the voices of people—people who may hold strongly held views from which disagreements arise, and from which only in listening for the harmonics within the disagreements can we hear the original, true leading.

Phillip Veatch, clerk