

Compiled Listening Group Notes

[Link to prompts](#)

JHYM Sessions, January 11th 2025

[Prompt 2]

1. The people. People coming together from different places. Seeing people is a key motivator to attend.
2. Worship
3. Community
4. Fellowship
5. Community has more life in these gatherings than business. One Friend shared that thinking about global issues in business meeting causes anxiety. They would rather spend their time with Friends doing things that relieve the tendency towards anxiety.
6. Talking with other Quakers about what it means to live our lives as Friends.

[Prompt 5]

7. Many in the group had a strong negative reaction to the idea of an online-based Sessions without an in-person component. The group asked that it be noted that online only Sessions is the least appealing option for them. The sorts of connections that can be made via in-person gatherings (such as informal one-on-one and small group relationship building) are highly cherished. Zoom not only limits the number of connections that can be made at once, it limits the way people can connect. It also recalls the early days of the pandemic, a painful and isolating time for many young people in the group.
 - a. Instead of having Sessions online, do it in tents? (Lower risk but in-person)
8. The most appealing of the alternative scenarios in the packet was the limited housing option. Although it might change evenings at Sessions somewhat, it keeps much of what feels most essential.

- a. Fellowship and shared meals are a very important part of Sessions. Is there a way to encourage commuters to stay on-site through dinner and/or join in the morning for breakfast?
 - b. For housing, families with babies and young children should be prioritized, along with people who can't afford hotels or other options. Care should be taken in determining who can stay on campus and it should be based on need.
 - c. It makes sense for Friends living closest to the site to commute but donate funds to support to the housing of Friends who live further away
9. Is it possible to lower costs by having Friends step into different types of volunteer roles usually paid for (cooking, cleaning teams, etc)?
 10. Wondering if one option might be an "every other year" option where the off years are not on-line only but very "no frills" in-person gathering such as at a cheaper site like a high school or campground.
 11. Is there more that can be done to fundraise to support in-person Sessions. Selling Quaker cookies?

[Prompt 5 (d)]

12. The JHers were largely in agreement and didn't note places where there was a lack of unity.

Young Friends Sessions Visioning Listening Session notes January 19, 2025

[Prompt 2]

13. A reminder of the collective spiritual experience of others on the Quaker path
14. Being around like minded people
15. Seeing a big community. For example, looking out and seeing everyone gathered in one room, worshipping together.
16. Being with a diverse mix of people sharing in a meaningful experience together
17. The depth of connection
18. Feeling welcomed
19. Singing together

20. Learning other's perspectives and spiritual experiences
21. Shared meals, especially multigenerational connections over meals. Eating together is an important way we get to know new Friends.

[Prompt 5]

22. The biggest area of unity was around the notion that the in-person time spent physically together and the opportunity for cross-generational relationship building were the most important aspects of Sessions.
23. The group was in agreement that online activities are the least appealing, although one group felt that it may be possible for business meetings to happen/continue in an online or hybrid format after a couple of days of in-person relationship building.
24. One Friend named that models that allow for individual choices are appealing. For example, individual choices about housing options and which activities to participate in during the event.
25. For some, the opportunity to participate in business meetings and then reflect on the experience with peers is a valuable aspect of Sessions.
26. For a number of Friends, the **shorter on-site option** was the most appealing of the alternative scenarios. Although having less time together would be a loss, there are some aspects of Sessions that could be cut out and still allow for the most meaningful components. What would they cut? One Friend suggested the coffeehouse and youth program field trips. Another suggested pairing this option with a focus on mid-year gathering.
27. One Friend wondered: What format will allow the most newcomers to join? An important part of Sessions is making new connections.
28. A number of Young Friends yearn for more time with the wider community at Sessions and less only with Young Friends. There was excitement from a number of Friends about moving from a focus on relationships internal to the YF group (which can happen at retreats throughout the year) towards a focus on participation more broadly, including in adult programming. There's a yearning

for more integration of experience across Sessions participants of various ages and a sense that the intergenerational aspect of Sessions is what's most vital.

- a. One Friend wondered if lighter formal programming and more space for connection making would lighten the load for Sessions planners (especially youth coordinators) while also re-shifting the focus towards relationships.
29. One small group discussed the possibility of lowering costs by renting fewer spaces and using the spaces we do have in a more multi-purpose way.

[Prompt 5 (d)]

30. One Friend named a concern about the **shorter on-site** option: For teens torn between more time at Friends Camp and Sessions, would a shorter Sessions be enough of a draw? Would it be possible to move Sessions to the end of the summer so as to not conflict with camp so no one would have to choose? Or would it be possible to shift the camp schedule slightly to allow NEYM Sessions to happen between the two teen sessions of camp.
31. For some, there was interest in the **every other year option** because it allowed some opportunity to continue to experience Sessions in the same format they have come to cherish. For others, the long stretches without a typical Sessions would bring significant losses and uncertainty. If youth would only have two summers in their high school years in the YF program, would that be enough? Only one summer as Junior Highers? Would it be viable to have the youth programs every summer and a typical Sessions every other summer? Or, could there be an every other year model where the "off" years follow the **regional network format**, with youth programs centralized. Could there be a youth trip or other special opportunity on the off years? Will moving to an every other year model strain relationships that require year to year interactions? That is important to avoid. Questions remain for the group about the pros, cons, and uncertainties of this model.
32. Some individuals expressed uncertainty around the limited housing model. More information would be needed about who would be on campus, how far away

others would be housed, and how that would impact the schedule. It's possible that model could work, but the specifics matter.

33. For some teens, the option to be housed away from their peers and with their parents or sponsors is more appealing than a Young Friend specific dorm (especially if the YF dorm is not air conditioned). Beyond air conditioning this option is appealing for some who felt their parents would all for more freedom than formal supervision by a program.

Falmouth Quarter, 1/25/25

[Prompt 1 (d)]

- 34. Have M&C committee be present
- 35. Centralized facility dedicated to our needs
- 36. More individuals testifying to their experience
- 37. More small group activities
- 38. Not overlap with FC Fell session ; more kids be able to participate
- 39. More business arising out of worship vs. pre-planned agenda
- 40. Be able to travel less to sessions
- 41. Too expensive
- 42. Stood out in the reading:
 - a. trying to do too much
 - b. How bleak the outlook is for continuing
- 43. But in that vein: "The packet presented the variables as unchangeable: But if we could increase attendance OR donations, we might not have to make some of these choices. We can do more. Historically we *have* done more."

Post-gathering comments at Brunswick FM:

- 44. more intergenerational activities, so parents aren't always separate from their kids
- 45. Summer is hard because that's when all our visitors come to Maine, so we can't get away

[Prompt 2]

46. Community

- a. Connecting with Friends of different spiritual experiences
- b. Being able to connect/reconnect with friends from other YM gatherings
- c. Working with the same folk for many years
- d. A genuine evolving and continually growing community
- e. What happens “in between” official events – at lunches, evenings
- f. Zoom is not an afterthought

47. Participating in corporate discernment

- a. Worship for business
- b. Testifying on the floor ; and then letting others speak
- c. Cooking together in a cauldron of new understandings
- d. Getting to talk or ask about big ideas in Quakerism
- e. Hard core Quakerism/Quaker magic
- f. Smaller meetings get a chance to meet with other quakers
- g. Important to be among different people for worship
- h. Witnessing the skills of the clerks (presiding, recording)

48. Bible Half Hours

49. Family Time/Richness of Programs for youth

50. Interacting with other people’s kids

51. Transformational power – has changed my spiritual life

52. “how do I love thee? Let me count the ways” - the whole package

53. (The fact that not everyone is called to attend is not a weakness) (*I missed the sense of this*)

[Prommpt 2(b)]

54. Community

- a. Meetings learn they are part of something larger than themselves
- b. Meetings discover what concerns other meetings are carrying ; are we in fact paying attention to how we could be called
- c. Knowing people across meetings

- d. Participating in Yearly meeting committees encourages the benefits of community
- e. Mutuality of meetings, YM can help local meeting and vice versa (but YM can feel remote when your local meeting is failing)

55. Quakerism

- a. Knowing about NEYM's relationship with Cuban YM
- b. Legacy Gifts witness grants
- c. story about how how some members of a FQM meeting attended sessions and it had transformed the meeting from a "Community church that's quaker into a quaker meeting that serves the community"
- d. Spreading conviction – the intensity and length of our time together encourages walking deeper into the Water of the spirit. We need cross pollination re: "this is what the water's like).

56. Corporate Discernment

- a. Discernment that goes into the theme, BHHs, speakers is one of the ways we show up for each other

Comments:

- 57. "one local meeting actively discouraged us from attending YM"
- 58. We need to be proactive about putting ourselves on the list for YM newsletter—doesn't happen automatically
- 59. Some meetings don't *want* to receive the gifts of YM sessions attendance ; other attenders don't pass on what they receive very well
- 60. Sometimes people can experience divine assistance in smaller groups but can miss it in the big business meetings at sessions

[Prompt 3]

- 61. Long weekend plus hybrid
- 62. Shorter version of our current session
- 63. Give people a little less to do at once but more time to connect
- 64. Regional gatherings might offload and also feed Sessions
- 65. Shortening sessions does concern some: may not get into the water deep enough
- 66. "This conversation made me realize I don't want to take sessions for granted."

67. Not supportive of online only, or of separation of youth in person and adults virtual. No enthusiasm for regional events brought together virtually.

Comments:

68. Once again we were asked: what could we do to revitalize YM structure? Have we done enough assessment to determine if we have capacity to hold sessions as they exist? Should we reconsider inviting volunteers to pick back up some of the work that staff has taken on in recent years. There has been intentional shifting of work from volunteers to staff because staff are more efficient (true) but staff are also way over capacity -

69. Money vs schedules: let's challenge the assumption of not having (or being able to bring in) enough money. Money requires commitment. Are we thinking too *small*? Portland (oak street meeting) at one point built an entire facility to hold quarterly meeting.

70. Also, let's look at YM overall – are there other things we could cut back on? Baby boom is an issue: Population of youth in NEYM dropped from 800 to 400 (*don't know where that stat came from and I didn't write the time frame...*)

71. Given the age we are currently living in, there could be a big sea change in our need to be together

72. Since the beginning of Pay as led we reduced focus on individuals/meetings contributing to Equalization. This means only sessions attendees provide additional support. We also stopped asking for representatives from meetings—and attendance went down. Cause and effect?

73. A sustainable way forward may be a constellation of events: regional one day events and retreats offer connections points. Can't fit *everything* into a long weekend; some suggested doing business outside the weekend, some suggested moving community events outside of sessions

74. Corporate discernment and workshops are valuable but we also need time for “refreshment” of the soul

75. A lot of energy is put into workshops that conflict with each other and compete for small attendance—offer less so can really dig into something. Perhaps rotate groups over the years?
76. How much staff time (and room cost) is put into planning workshops/interest groups? Could we reduce costs some by offering less of that?
77. Reminder : M&C committee needed. Also Development committee. Sessions committee was also referenced as being needed.
78. It was said that Sessions and Youth programs are the most important things NEYM does, so if staff needs to cut back, it shouldn't be those things.
79. Thinking about the people who *aren't* here, who aren't invested in YM. How to find out why not?
80. Heavy comment: Hard to hear today's reactions because basically we are saying we want things to stay the same. But staff and volunteers are worn down by making sessions function. What are we, individually and as meetings, led to do to make sessions happen in a sustainable fashion? The only things we heard at all were shortening Sessions (possibly fewer workshops/interest groups) and if needed, move some business to PB. We would like to consider moving more tasks back to volunteers, but are not clear if volunteers are there anymore.

Westerly Monthly Meeting, 1/28/25

[Prompt 1]

81. Most found the background and history of Sessions helpful , enlightening, and professional. The Models of adaptation were particularly effective in offering concrete solutions.
82. One wished for reinstatement of anchor groups to build deeper relationships with Friends in the broader NEYM community.
83. One wished to take away the risk of infection and maintain all Youth Programs in person.
84. One wished for monetary freedom to maintain Sessions as they are. We realized that is not viable

85. Several wished for an efficient approach to Meeting for Business—so that the meeting could focus on the more contentious or weighty issues.
86. One wished that the Staff of NEYM be better remunerated and felt that we need to establish priorities and simplify.

[Prompt 2]

87. Discussion focused only on Gatherings, but eventually expanded to all the various meetings
88. Having NEYM as the “mothership” has helped some Friends to renew spiritual energy and consider new life blood to our Quaker practices.
89. Being together once a year is a palpable asset.
90. Workshops and one day retreats to consider inspiring topics gives energy.
91. Getting to know Friends from other meetings and sharing differences of practice helps us to broaden our thinking and see things differently.
92. The gifts we and our meeting experience from these gatherings has been deep examples were:
- a. Clerking workshops where new Clerks could learn about the Quaker process and understand the concept of “sense of the meeting”.
 - b. Elements of Quakerism which served as a template for spiritual exploration of the basis of Quakerism
 - c. Bread Day- a tactile community experience, etc.
 - d. Some were fed by workshops focusing on technology and financial issues that last only a few hours or less.
 - e. Others were energized by “Living Faith Day” and “Meeting Care Day”

[Prompt 3]

93. Recognizing that it is a powerful experience to have as many Quakers gather as possible to Eat, Pray and work together, perhaps shortening the time to a long weekend would help.

94. We realize that changing Sessions will have repercussions on several practices ex: if we shorten Meeting for Business who or what group will fulfill those obligations? The Quarterly Meetings? The Permanent board?
95. Look for Quarterly or Monthly Meetings to organize or hold more presentations and workshops in cooperation with NEYM and other organizations.
96. -One suggestion was for Friends to review the documents sent beforehand and to approve items for business under the “ Unity Agenda” or the non-controversial items before Meeting for Business.
97. There was a unified feeling that the staff and few volunteers can't do everything and there is a need to simplify the workload.
98. One Friend mentioned the need for Friends to get to know one another better and build trust among ourselves so we have more trust in our leadership and members of the Permanent Board and the work they do on our behalf.

[Prompt 4]

99. We know we are on the right path when we see energy and attention to the spirit. This results in reaching people and then seeing them engage and participate .
100. Recognizing that small meetings can not do it all on our own. Another indicator is that there is coalition building between meetings; for example we could join with Providence meeting's appeal for Gun control .
101. "That the preliminary proposal for Revisioning Sessions is disseminated to the broader NEYM community and receives a positive response that enables us to move forward."
102. Items that block the path to spiritual health are when we do not trust one another or can not let go of ego and judgement. In the new process of reconfiguring Sessions we know there will be mistakes and we will need to be patient and open to change moving forward.

[Prompt 5]

103. We reached unity that Sessions length should be shortened and process simplified.
104. We hope to maintain our faith traditions and beliefs
105. We are concerned for the Staff workload and capacity—trying to reach a balance between meeting the needs of families and individuals and conducting business.
106. We pray that this opportunity for large Yearly Quaker gatherings does not end.

Comment:

One other thing that was mentioned: Our listening Group wondered why much of our Monthly meeting were not involved nor attended Quarterly nor NEYM workshops or sessions.

Addendum from one member who could not attend the listening session:

Having read the minutes of the meeting about Sessions at Westerly Friends. I have a few thoughts as a new member of the meeting.

I am in a personal situation where my wife is not a member nor attendee of the Westerly Monthly Meeting. This puts me in an awkward position when being asked to be away from home overnight or longer.

I should mention in addition I am not a fan of Zoom and I can't image [sic] spending days and countless hours in front of my computer for a multi-day Sessions meeting.

This all leads me to ask exactly what NEYM Sessions is trying to accomplish and as noted in the minutes can some items be communicated in advance and comments pro and con as appropriate be submitted in advance to streamline the process.

I have no problem driving an hour or so for in-person meetings but I would like to return home at night. That said, might it be possible create a special day at the end of Sessions where one could come in person to learn about what has transpired and provide some useful input and/or feedback.

Please keep in mind I am making these suggestions with no experience of attending or understanding of Session. I provide these thoughts to give you a sense of my current understanding as I think about a multi-day Quaker meeting.

Framingham Friends Meeting, February 2, 2025

Richard Lindo, FFM Clerk, opened the meeting with the following background:

A NEYM committee has discerned 6 potential options for the future structure of Sessions gatherings. In April a meeting will take place to discuss next steps. Elizabeth is here to listen and seek subtleties that don't come through on paper. All Yearly Meetings face the same situation: the post-COVID reality and challenges of large gatherings.

Our discussion will follow the guidelines provided by NEYM but in a fluid manner.

Discussion with a focus on questions 1 and 3 (each paragraph below represents one individual's commentary):

107. This commentator has been involved with Sessions in official capacities over the years including registrar and housing coordinator. Attendance went from 800 to smaller numbers now. Change is needed. Resources don't allow for past Sessions structure. Child care was great as a parent participant. Wonderful Youth Program but it is not what it was. NEYM is central to her Quaker identity. It provides a community that youth can trust and provides a spiritual connection. Willing to do what I can to keep annual Sessions as strong as possible. Suggested structure includes a shorter on site in-person meeting over a weekend with substance, meeting annually. Consider offering limited food options, limited housing and not all online. An in-person experience is crucial.
108. One commented that they went to one Sessions gathering and attended as a day participant (hates sleeping in dorms). Led anti-racism work with Donna McDaniel. Her daughter co-presented on sexuality. Wonderful group experience.
109. Another has been attending for 30 years including in official capacities such as 4 years as recording clerk and on several committees. Has felt changes. Never

brought her kids due to expense. In the 80's they attended the Illinois Yearly Meeting. It was affordable and scaled down. They love Meeting for Business but over the years it has become too packed not allowing for spiritual discernment to happen. Leaving with sense that decisions are presented in advance to be rubber-stamped which is discomfiting. Forced attendance at affinity groups was not appreciated but has stopped. There is "dis=ease" within NEYM. The leadership has goals not coming from the body. Sessions need spaciousness and spirit. Focus on this instead of business. Suggestion: 2 appointees from each monthly meeting appointed to do business quarterly on Zoom. Each monthly meeting will be represented without filtration. Disband permanent board, let reps from the monthly meetings do business quarterly. Let Sessions be a spiritual experience.

110. Another would go if it were a more spiritual experience. The schedule makes no sense. Start on Friday when people have time off and end on Monday. The time schedule was not conducive to attendance. Prefers to attend FGC Gatherings because it is a more spiritual experience. Don't go all online. Maybe business online but not everything.
111. One person's Magic Wand Response follows: It would be nice to turn back time to 25 years ago. Liked it then. Been going for 35 years without missing. His calling was to participate in youth programming. Then for 5 years had committee responsibilities so had to attend Business Meeting and not engage in youth programming. However, he has not attended Business meeting since this 5-year period. Most important aspect for him is the connection between kids, staff and families. He loves the following: shared meals, sharing living space and staying in a dorm. Change is inevitable. Of the options offered, shorter on site is better than nothing. Biennially, possibly, but not sure if it is sustainable. Do not offer only online as an option. Reducing youth retreats to 3 a year has had a negative impact on the bonding between kids.
112. Another added, if meeting biennially, then business has to be conducted differently.

113. Another person agreed that a 2-year cycle is not good, especially for kids. They need to maintain relationships.
114. One participant stated that once he had children, he learned of NEYM. This family attended retreats and sessions. The youth sessions were drop off and run. It gave us parents a break. He then became involved with youth programming. Spent most time at Sessions with young Friends. It was 24 hours/6 days. Teens didn't have a connection with the rest of NEYM. They were off doing their own thing in the Young Friends dorm. He didn't personally attend Business Meetings but appreciated meeting others with different experiences of Quakerism in New England. The anchor groups were beneficial. Workshops and worship groups sharing different experiences of Quakerism was beneficial. Online Sessions is not attractive, especially for kids. In person is important. His kids went to YouthQuake and were exposed to FUM practices. His kids also went to Cuba. They remain in contact with those early event participants. Prefers in-person, long weekend. Hard to find staff to commit for longer. He noted that the work commitment for youth leaders ate into time to participate in the NEYM experience.
115. In-person is crucial and a long weekend option is preferred.
116. One stated that NEYM Sessions attendance also began through their kids. Great relief to drop them off at Youth Camp. Not a business meeting person. Opening/Closing are fine, but did not participate in between. Has had official roles in the past and has one now. One observation is that instead of listening to reports during Business Meeting, why not just read them ahead of time? Gathering in-person is important for youth. Their kids have grown through the community building and wants to see that continue. No to online. Biannually feels like a loss. Weekend could work. Less housing could work but could impact those coming from a distance. The idea of permanent board reform is interesting. Motivation for Sessions attendance is to be with other Quakers and meet people. It is about community building, not Business Meeting. Trusts that our monthly meeting committees are making the best decisions they can.

117. Attended once and the experience for their daughter to meet other Quakers was important to her and should be preserved.
118. Has been involved with Sessions over decades, starting as a Young Friend. In person gathering is very important. Quarterly Meeting seems to have dissolved. The current structure is disjointed. Having inter-visitation and contact with other Quarterly members may be an approach. Attending Quarter Sessions at Sessions was a workshop more than business. In 2012, went to the Great Meeting House at Bryant College. Perhaps this should be the annual site. Have a weekend there. Long 360 year history there. There are moments where Meeting for Business cracks open your world but they are few. Permanent Board issues were surprising last year and only came to light at Sessions. Prefers a news structure that is In-person for a weekend. Perhaps meeting outside under a tent in the world.
119. This speaker is in support of Meeting for Business and has learned of different issues like support of Native Americans and tax resistance. It allows Quakers to grapple with world issues together exploring what Quakers can do in the world. Don't water it down. Make sure Meeting for Business is the center of the gathering.
120. A final comment was that kids need to be together, they can sleep on the floor but older people won't and many don't like dorms. Suggests finding a place with a large meetinghouse for kids to gather in a centralized area like Western Massachusetts or Boston with hotels nearby.

Richard Lindo provided the following summary of comments:

121. Meeting in-person to promote personal connections for all especially, youth, is a preferred approach.
122. A shorter session held annually seems strongly held.
123. There is some support for a campus setting but there was mixed commentary allowing for different housing arrangements.

124. Tension exist between Business Meeting remaining central or if Business Meeting should be done outside of Sessions through a representative body and Sessions becoming a more spiritual gathering
125. Business Meeting needs to be focused, not just reading reports. Richard noted that a “consent agenda” has been implemented to create space for more discernment regarding issues that should be considered.
126. Concerns about the Permanent Board were expressed by some. This raises the question of whether change is worth considering. The past year’s controversies contribute to a view that should be addressed by NEYM.
127. NOTE: The sentiment expressed regarding NEYM leadership was not shared by all attendees of this session.
128. The timeframe receiving most support is a long weekend, not a work week.

Putney Friends Meeting, February 7, 2025

[Prompt 1]

129. Sessions are “a long activity for participants and staff.”
130. Presenting a theme to explore may provide more focus.
131. It is hard to do discernment in conducting business with 750 people present, bringing a range of understandings and often coming in with conflicting agendas.
132. Clerks have a challenging job.
133. “It is an incredible amount of work to pull off Sessions.”
134. “It tries to be much more than just a business meeting.”
135. It can be “a powerful experience for kids.”
136. There are Friends in the Yearly Meeting community for whom Sessions are their major experience and expression of Friends. There are others with no sense of a connection to Sessions.
137. Are there other ways to meet needs for communication which can accomplish or broaden what Sessions does?
138. A Friend who has attended essentially all in-person Sessions for many decades and has been active on committees sees much change over the years but a continuing sense of people being drawn together.
139. “Magic wand” image: “Put all of us in one of those grand old meeting houses that hold 1000, with Friends staying in the homes of other Friends. Next to an ocean.
140. No fees.”

[Prompt 2]

141. Small short gatherings with a topic focus, such as one held last fall with 15-20 Friends “tossing around” the topic of eldership. Sharing of personal and historical insights was rich. Topics have been well defined and leadership is well prepared.
142. Gatherings of local meeting leaders, now generally held virtually, provide beneficial connections. They are well coordinated.
143. Friends enjoy carpooling and staying with other Friends as a feature of small gatherings.
144. NEYM used to have about four committee days per year, when multiple committees met at the same location. That got people to different sites around the region and together with one another. There was agreement that this model probably can’t be made to work well nowadays.
145. Recent extended worship sessions have been very well received.
146. Committees with defined objective responsibilities shared by most meetings, such as Archives and Nominating, benefit from in-person gatherings which occur once or twice a year, often in conjunction with YM Sessions.
147. NEYM has played a much-appreciated role in bringing Friends together with Friends from a distance, including foreign countries (Cuba, Bolivia, etc.) This broadening of experience and understanding has to do not only with international ties, but with ties to other philosophical branches of the Society of Friends.
148. There is a group newly forming to address Friends response to current concerns related to immigration.
149. The Yearly Meeting has increased its efforts to assist the life and effectiveness of its quarterly meetings.
150. Bread Day has been an enjoyable activity coordinated by the Yearly Meeting but with a fundamentally local application.

[Prompt 3]

151. Friends felt that shorter duration of Sessions, combined with increased emphasis on focused activities through the year, speaks to our needs.
152. Friends did not feel that every-other-year Sessions or wholly on-line Sessions are a good response.
153. Regional networking, probably making more use of quarterly meeting structure, may be useful.
154. There was some feeling that the “limited housing” option might be positive if it offers a closer relationship to the local community where a Session is being held. This option would seem best to be combined with a shorter duration.
155. Business at Sessions should be made briefer and more efficient with more preliminary seasoning of concerns to be considered. The business portion of Sessions does not have to give all concerns equal weight in allocating time and

energy. Regional input to planning this may make it work without losing core values of Quaker business practice. A goal could be for everything on the business agenda to have had discernment at the monthly meeting and quarterly meeting level. This has the potential advantage of broadening the discernment and seasoning of business.

- a. Energy to accomplish these changes may have to be generated by multiple individuals within the YM and less than previously by YM Staff.
- b. A shorter (say three-day) Sessions suggests more spiritual focus and less “vacation”. This can be a “precious” benefit.

[Prompt 4]

156. The process of Sessions Visioning: Friends felt that process we are following is a good path. Ways we know this: how well do we find that we are communicating as the process moves along? How do we go about doing so?
157. It is okay that some people aren’t interested in talking about this, and we don’t have to make everyone have a conversation.
158. People need to feel connected to their local meeting, which means some may not feel connected with YM
159. Metrics:
 - a. attendance and involvement at Sessions.
 - b. Meaningful engagement.
 - c. Successful committee work of the YM is the “drumbeat of sessions”
 - i. Suggestion to “open” committee work and outreach. Workshops presenting committee concerns and programs to enhance understanding of the many things committees do—not necessarily timed as part of sessions.

[Prompt 5]

160. We know each other
161. We are “powerfully gathered” when we meet as Friends.
162. There is inherent tension between staff doing work and volunteers doing work (this is not necessarily a negative thing).
163. We see preferences in our discernment today- but no one right way.
164. Fiscal responsibility must always be in mind
165. Hybrid sessions has definite limitations, but can work for some features (eg. Bible Half Hours).
166. There is value in our connections beyond our local meetings.
167. Committee work is an important vehicle for communication and action.
168. Intervisitation and spontaneous relationships among Friends and their meetings should be encouraged.

169. The clarity and efficiency of the process of conducting business at YM needs work.

[Prompt 6]

170. Friends appreciated the work done to create a framework for this discussion.
171. Disagreement isn't an existential threat.

JYM Sessions Visioning: Feb 9, 2025

[Prompt 2]

172. Free time
173. Being able to ask for help
174. Space for kids to be kids
175. Stuff (like legos) for kids to be kids. Games.
176. Accessible for everyone
177. Intergenerational opportunities
178. Dance parties
179. Schedules—know what time things are happening
180. Sharing spaces/roommates: choices about people
181. Knowing ahead of time who will be in your dorm

[Prompt 3] Ideas for the future of Sessions:

182. It's not worth it just for two days but on the other hand it's easier for parents to get away from work
183. Make Sessions two extra days!
184. As many people on campus as possible
185. One group didn't want every other year—would prefer a shorter time in-person every year
186. Another group didn't want every other year but did suggest regional every other year—also a group suggested long sessions one year, short sessions the next
187. People did not like the online option
188. One big room with different options like a gym

[Prompt 5]

189. This group was in unity that a virtual-only or every-other year Sessions were not going to meet needs for community and connection, which seemed among the highest values of Sessions expressed by the group.
190. While many expressed a desire to keep everything the same, there was a willingness to experiment with alternate formats. Several people suggested alternating a “normal” Sessions one year with one of the alternate formats in other years. One idea I heard from a small group that I don’t think got captured in the large group was requiring each attendee to do at least a small volunteer job to help spread out the work.

**Bennington Monthly Meeting Listening Session on NEYM Annual Sessions
February 9, 2025**

[Prompt 5]

191. Sessions should be shorter, simpler, and more focused on worship and discernment rather than other activities.
192. There is a desire for deeper worship and good modeling of Quaker practice.
193. In-person gatherings are strongly preferred over virtual options.
194. Housing and logistics should be simplified, possibly by having attendees arrange their own accommodations. A flat fee could be applied for all other costs, and meetings could assume the primary responsibility for financial assistance of members and attenders who need it.
195. We are aware that something would be lost if children and youth are separated completely from adult sessions.
196. Evaluating sessions should focus primarily on whether Truth had prospered, as well as on the number of Friends in attendance.
197. There is concern that the work of the Permanent Board be more readily available to local meetings. Having some Permanent Board meetings held in

local meeting areas throughout the year would help in preparation for annual sessions.

198. Overall, the group expressed a desire to refocus sessions on deep worship and discernment.

[Prompt 6]

199. Our meeting greatly benefitted by holding this listening session and was struck by the amount of unity that emerged. We wish to express our deep appreciation to the yearly meeting for planning and arranging for these listening sessions.

Worcester Friends Meeting, February 11, 2025

[Prompt 1]

200. The historical background was interesting to read
201. This comment resonated: prior feedback provides 2 conflicting feelings: wanting more of what they liked, but also being tired/exhausted by the length of the gathering.
202. “Pay As Led” has in some way contributed to financial struggle. Yet it has also contributed to allowing people to attend who otherwise might not have
203. Make Sessions free of charge
204. Held in a place that is easy to get to and for everyone to stay easily
205. Have enough volunteers to fully staff the youth programs
206. Bring young people in to Business Meeting to witness and understand that part of the process
207. More comfortable accommodations, no plastic-covered mattresses, better water pressure in the showers
208. Have Business conducted Quarterly, only items needing corporate discernment by the entire Yearly Meeting body would be brought to Sessions, and through prep work they could be much briefer discussions

[Prompt 1(b)].

209. One person contributed that Sessions was a nurturing place for their child with special needs as he was growing up
210. Several people commented on the value of connecting with others:
- a. As a newcomer, it was easy to get to meet people and know people
 - b. It was comfortable and enjoyable to meet a variety of Quakers, and to meet Quakers who were “like me”
 - c. People appreciate the opportunity to connect with others doing similar social justice work
 - d. Fellowship contributed a sense of fullness and meaning
 - e. We noticed all the ways that Friends connect: a youth and parents of youth, around advocacy and work, in worship, in committees. It is all important AND it is a challenge for the Yearly Meeting to support all of this
211. There was discussion about the location.
- a. One person felt personally connected to Castleton VT
 - b. Another person commented that the closer distance to Bryant University made it easier to attend Sessions for a portion of the time (1-2 days only) which had benefits as a working person
212. There was unity around the observation that the large portion of time spent on business may be a detractor - it may discourage some people from coming partway through (as they would have missed the initial Business sessions and so feel that they were not up to speed), or deter them from attending altogether because they don't want to attend so many business sessions. It also detracts from the focus on worship and fellowship that others would like to see.

[Prompt 2]

213. Two members contributed positively about participation in extended worship. It is a valuable worship experience for them personally, and enriches their worship experience when worshipping with the Monthly Meeting.
214. Several people spoke to the value of the youth programs:

- a. Having people of all ages, particularly young people, present at Yearly Meeting gatherings makes the gatherings more complete.
 - b. The youth programs embody Quaker values and as such are enriching to all of us
 - c. There was a suggestion to use the youth programs as a guide for how to run Yearly Meeting programs for all of us: focus on joy and love, connecting with others, processing our experiences, brief/focused business, and worship
215. Participating in Yearly Meeting events provides an opportunity to connect with Quakers beyond our local or provincial experience. Friends expressed value in meeting others from other Monthly Meetings, Yearly Meetings, and other countries. It expands our view of who Quakers are.
216. Participating in NEYM committee work gives one individual a way to participate in discussions about issues that are meaningful and advocate for causes that are important to that person (specifically LGBT concerns and addressing our history of racism)
217. Others enjoy the Living Faith gatherings as they focus on worship, learning, and fellowship with less emphasis on business
218. Recent opportunities to network around areas of concern (immigration, political policy) have been sustaining

[Prompt 3]

219. One suggestion gained considerable traction with our group: shorten Sessions to 4 days, with main focus on worship and fellowship; move business to quarterly sessions conducted with representatives of the Monthly Meetings. Some business should still occur in person at Sessions as the face-to-face corporate discernment is essential to Friends. The business conducted at Sessions could be limited by extensive pre-work and also discernment about what business truly needs to come before Sessions.
220. One Friend requested more opportunities to share about social action, provides a means for connection to others from other Meetings

221. As the Yearly Meeting moves forwards, we ask the Yearly Meeting to be mindful about what needs to/should happen in person vs what should/could happen on zoom. We acknowledged that virtual connection works well for some tasks, for example, Zoom provides ability to connect with others from across the Yearly Meeting around advocacy issues
222. One way forward would be to focus on what brings us joy - singing, worshipping, fellowship, connecting with people we don't get to see often
223. One person suggested to discontinue the hybrid option at annual sessions and make it a purely in-person gathering. This would simplify the setup and logistics. Some other events during the year could be offered as virtual events.
224. There was discussion about the bookstore which is a unique and valuable Quaker resource, especially in regards to the children's books, books about Quakerism, and the materials for First Day School. There is so much set-up involved, though, that the bookstore needs at least 3-4 days to make it worthwhile.
225. There was some discussion about offering a more robust camping option to help with costs and housing options.
226. It was also suggested (modeled on Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association) that it may be helpful to vary the location around the Yearly Meeting year to year (or alternate between two locations) so that people living in different areas would have easier time accessing the location and attending for part of the duration of Sessions (1-2 days instead of the entire conference).

[Prompt 4]

227. Use statistics to gauge how we are doing:
- a. % newcomers
 - b. % newcomers who return for a 2nd year (as a measure of retention)
 - c. Involvement of youth and young adults
 - d. Maintaining or growing participation overall (Some worried that having to find your own housing accommodation would be a barrier to attendance)

- e. Look at attendance from Bryant vs Castleton years. Did more people attend in one location than the other? Did more people attend for partial sessions in one location (suggesting it may be more possible for working people to drop in for 1-2 days)
- 228. Financial sustainability - with the changes made, is NEYM Sessions breaking even?
- 229. Continuing to be able to fill/staff the NEYM committees (In other words, as we change YM structure, are we going to have difficulty getting people to serve on committees?)
- 230. Continuing to meet the needs of attendees with special needs. We can't compromise on this and we note it represents a greater percentage of our attendees.

[Prompt 5]

- 231. There is unity that we do not want on-line only, we want to connect in person. There is longing for person-to-person connection across the Yearly Meeting and beyond; this enriches our experience as Friends.
- 232. We would not want to be staying in different locations because we prioritize the fellowship that comes from staying in the same place, eating together, and having evenings together. Whatever option we come up with, we do not want to compromise the being together. Cost savings should come in a different form, for example by shortening the duration.
- 233. There is unity that we need to focus on youth programs and continue to involve youth; the challenge is in staffing the youth programs and also in providing a nurturing experience for the people who do the youth staffing

[Prompt 6]

- 234. We felt a sense of gathered-ness in this conversation.
- 235. This conversation feels like more than a conversation about NEYM Session. It was a conversation about being Quaker, how we connect, and what we bring to our daily lives.

236. At this time in our country, it feels more important than ever to gather among like-minded people, people who share our values

Lawrence Meeting February 16, 2025

[Prompt 3?]

A Vision of Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions in the Future---A Listening

Session: This issue resonated with the Meeting, and a great many suggestions were made to find inexpensive and innovative ways to hold Annual Sessions.

237. One Friend emphasized that young people and their parents should be the focus of our efforts.
238. The following suggestions were made:
- a. Make use of one of the Quaker-owned properties as the site for YM. In this way, a Friend's institution will receive income from the Gathering. Sites such as Moses Brown School and Friends Camp were suggested.
 - b. Hold YM on board a cruise ship which has been anchored in a local harbor or placed in dry dock for repairs. One Friend recalled that Columbia Gas Company chartered a cruise ship anchored in Boston Harbor to house the thousands of utility workers required to rebuild the Merrimack Valley after the Gas Explosions in 2018.
 - c. Buy an inexpensive parcel of countryside property for use by the YM for Annual Sessions. This property could be near a hotel for those requiring more comfort.
 - d. Build a facility owned by the YM to house Annual Sessions.

Providence Monthly Meeting, February 16 & 17

239. I understand that the cost of Sessions is considerable. I would like to have the children meet in person while the rest is conducted online. We need to do more at Quarterly meetings.

240. I favor either shorter Sessions or regional gatherings. Online doesn't bring people together, which is important.
241. I was only at Sessions once. Castleton is too far away. Can we find a more centrally located site?
242. I attended twice when Sessions was at Bryant University. The in-person experience is important, and more informal settings might be preferable to classrooms.
243. I have never been to Sessions. I would prefer a more central location and shorter duration.
244. I am calling in from Alaska. Here we have alternated locations and it has worked well given the vast size of the state.
245. I have never been to Sessions due to the distance and the time span. I suggest doing more with Quarterly meetings, and perhaps visiting other Quarterly meetings. Could Sessions be every other year?
246. I've been to Sessions when it was at Bryant. I suggest rethinking the format and redesigning the whole thing. I found it hard to break into small clusters of folks who knew each other. And no competitive knitting!
247. I used to go regularly but it was expensive and at times felt like another professional meeting, with people rushing to scheduled events.
248. I have not been to Sessions but have attended at FGC. Perhaps Sessions should just be for the necessary business.
249. Work camps in Philadelphia were a powerful experience as a child. Could Sessions include working together?
250. Sessions will be at UMass Amherst this coming summer.
251. In-person gatherings are especially important for children.
252. In the past there were annual gatherings of committees such as Peace and Social Concerns or Ministry and Counsel. All were welcome. This was a valuable way to find out what was going on at other meetings.
253. Boston would be a more central location.
254. Given that expense is an issue, more could be done online, especially committee work. More energy could be put into Quarterly meetings.

255. Why are there not more people here today? What are we not doing to be inviting? We need to do more discerning of our own community.
256. Most Friends in the room are retired. Programs have to have enough content to attract young families.
257. Why is it so hard to get people to attend Meeting for Business?
258. We need to attend to the whole community, including young people.
259. We have to create attractive events. Programs for youths should be high priority. Quarterly Meeting has a lot of unrealized potential.
260. Young folks are trying to find out how to fit into this nebulous organization. We need to take advantage of social hour.
261. In-person gatherings help children make friends and learn about Quakerism. Could more business be conducted by Permanent Board and keep Sessions shorter?
262. We are organizing a Young Adult Friends group here.
263. How about family camp? Business at Sessions could be conducted by designated representatives from each monthly meeting.
264. I attended Sessions in 2024. I found it hard to connect with the workshop offerings, which need to be relevant and interesting.
265. I attended New York Yearly Meeting Sessions in the 1970's. There were exciting discussions related to the war in Vietnam. I can't imagine how that would have worked on Zoom with its lack of interpersonal interactions. The issues had to do with what positions the yearly meeting should take in regard to the war, including the degree of support to be given to persons refusing to serve. We may be facing serious issues now that will require similar discernment.
266. I went to a Living Faith gathering, which inspired me to attend Sessions. What appealed was a break from my normal life, spending time with friendly people seeking spiritual guidance.
267. When we hosted a NEYM teen retreat here, it was great to see the meetinghouse put to good use other than just on Sunday.
268. Driving up to Vermont for a week seems like a lot for me and my family. Smaller events would be more attractive.

269. People go to Sessions for socializing, Quaker decision-making, and to be challenged both intellectually and spiritually. I'm thinking of places like Pendle Hill and Chautauqua.
270. The various means of communication have made it less necessary to wait for an annual meeting to conduct business, which can be accomplished by smaller, more local groups. Responsibility for decisions could be delegated to these smaller groups, and the small groups might be more interesting to attend.
271. A Discord channel might be a good way to connect with Friends outside Meeting. It's like an organized chat room.
272. Some find that Zoom is unsatisfactory. Every means of communication will be inaccessible to some, but while in-person community building is preferable, it's good to have other options.
273. The necessity of gathering in person has changed due to better means of communication. If there is already a personal connection between people, electronic communication can be more powerful.
274. The use of social media should be carefully moderated.
275. Intervisitation can be useful. Worcester Friends attend Meeting for Worship wherever Quarterly Meeting is being held.
276. We are building and investing in a community where there is mutual trust. Coming together, including for the purpose of business, can help us understand each other.
277. I have experience coordinating conferences and it's interesting to see similar trends as we've been seeing in farmer conferences. Of course, the pandemic has played a big role, and increasing financial strain as noted in the materials handed out. In my experience a lot of people benefit immensely from this kind of programming going online, and of course there are also many who would be less interested or have a harder time engaging.
278. The timeframe of the Sessions makes it pretty much impossible for me to join, especially in person, and I don't have much of an idea of what kind of content and experiences happen at these, so I feel like my input would be mostly from the event organizing side of things, and I'm happy to share from that experience. I

guess my biggest question is what are these Sessions meant to accomplish, and while I know that specific concrete goals are probably not the most useful way to look at that, I wonder if there are anecdotes of what Friends would generally agree on as "successes" from past Sessions that might help illustrate this a little more concretely, or some other way to make it clearer to non-attendees and new attendees why time and money are used in this way, other than because it's been done in the past.

Young adult Friends Midwinter, ca. February 16, 2025

[Prompt 2]

- 279. Deepening connection
- 280. Meeting and re-meeting more Friends
- 281. Learning more about Quakerism beyond our local area
- 282. Participation in discernment (for some)
- 283. Giving back/sharing our gifts (such as volunteering in youth programs)

[Prompt 3]

- 284. Limited housing might work, especially if Sessions is in an area that many Friends can commute from (like Boston)
 - a. Prioritize letting kids and people who can't commuter or afford hotels stay on-site
- 285. A shorter (3-4) Sessions might work
 - a. For a shorter Sessions the focus would be on worship, workshops, community building, building our spiritual muscles, and youth programs
- 286. If Sessions is shorter, have the more administrative aspects of business happen online
- 287. Focus on fundraising, digital marketing, and promotion so that more Friends come to Sessions
 - a. Wondering how local meetings can help more with outreach
- 288. Importance of youth programming being in-person

289. Desire to find creative ways to cut costs, including participants doing more labor
290. Indoor camping housing option?
291. Having discernment throughout the year
 - a. Replace Permanent Board with something that more specifically represents all meetings
292. Cut down on business by having quarters season proposals and encouraging participation in quarterly meetings
293. Desire for young Friends program to be more integrated into adult program

[Prompt 5]

294. Concern for some about the quality of Zoom-based or even hybrid discernment. Will Friends be able to discern well if we are not gathered? For some, online business meeting isn't the same
295. For some, concern about a limited housing: making arrangements individually may be burdensome and cost prohibitive
296. For some, a desire to free up space by having less business meeting. For others, a concern about delegating more business to Permanent Board, which could "flatten" the voices participating.
297. With the additional outreach, we need a clearer way to quickly explain to people what we mean by "annual sessions". Does outreach translate to younger generations? Wondering about the balance between/effectiveness word of mouth encouragement and digital promotion with both participation and volunteer recruitment
298. A wondering about how "new" newcomers can be and still have a meaningful experience at Sessions—might depend what they are looking for
299. Wondering how to communicate the challenges with participants

Winthrop Center Friends, February 20, 2025

[Prompt 1(b)]

300. For those of us who had experienced Sessions it had been very important when we were younger. As we've gotten older the travel to, and the stamina necessary for attending Sessions has become more difficult.
301. One Friend described it as "co-parenting her daughter", another as "the highlight of the year"
302. We found the example of the younger people was empowering and uplifting. We appreciated times when Sessions activities could be intergenerational or we could easily meet and talk with young Friends informally.
303. There is something magical about being in a large group of Friends, knowing you share some basic understandings and faith – it enables freedom to engage with one another informally. These times of conversation are very valuable. It is inspiring to learn from Friends about their faith and their actions.
304. While Sessions is often a very rich experience of spiritual nurture, fun and fellowship it could be overwhelming at times causing one to hide out in the dorm room.
305. Worship has been a mixed experience – it seems often to be "very vocal". One Friends found people knitting or doing other handwork in worship and meeting for business to be distracting.
306. While business sessions over the years have been at times very moving, and the clerking inspiring, there seem to be more and more attempts to hijack them by people with grievances or very narrowly-focused concerns, who are determined to be heard. One can tire of hearing the same voices "singing the same tune" every year. One Friend felt very uncomfortable with the "Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness" - it felt harsh. Another appreciated having things called to our attention.
307. Committee work over the years has been very rewarding – offering a chance to get to know Friends better as we travel and work together – forming lasting friendships. Being able to connect with and work with Friends who have similar concerns feels like an important part of being a yearly meeting.
308. It also feels important to have the structure of concerns rising from MMs to QMs and on to the YM. Witnessing this happen is encouraging and energizing.

309. While the size of Sessions is challenging from many points of view there is a sense of strength in numbers.

[Prompt 1(a)]

310. What mostly struck those of us who read the background materials was that it came as a bit of a shock that Sessions is not sustainable. All the possible scenarios offered had benefits and drawbacks. No one scenario seemed like a clear way forward. We felt it important to acknowledge feelings of sadness and the weightiness of any change after so many years and we also wonder what opportunities a shift in structure might open up. It feels important to approach this discernment with expectation of joyful new Life emerging.

[Prompt 2]

311. Everyone present had attended regional gatherings and loved them. The number of people present at these felt “just right” to us – enough to feel part of a wider community of Friends but not so large as to be overwhelming. Also, the travel involved and the time commitment are more do-able. The experiences have been positive, friendly, warm and we came away with great information. The clerking workshop was very valuable. We formed connections which were helpful. There was certainly a rise in energy and enthusiasm as we discussed regional gatherings.
312. The monthly zoom leadership calls experienced have been very helpful and enjoyable.

[Prompt 3]

313. The biggest conundrum for us was how the business of the yearly meeting could be accomplished well. (Although we note that it is often difficult to do this during Sessions)
314. Might it be done yearly online only? Does this mean trusting and asking more of Permanent Board as they carry on the business of the YM in between Sessions?

315. Might there be quarterly online meetings for business with specific items to be covered each time – ones where the items wouldn't be carried over from one meeting to the next?
316. When there is a need might there be threshing sessions online for particular concerns?
317. We felt that more responsibility could be taken by monthly meetings to inform themselves of what is happening at the YM level and take part in it, rather than depending on YM staff to inform us.

[Prompt 2 (b)]

318. The feeling was that regional gatherings best serve our needs as a monthly meeting with perhaps the opportunity for a gathering of the whole YM every 3 years -perhaps just a weekend to be together for worship, speakers and fellowship. It is the camaraderie of a wider gathering that feels most important (though we still feel the conundrum of how to most faithfully do the necessary business of the whole YM). We want to feel a part of “something bigger” and appreciate the YM being able to speak out on our behalf.
319. Gathering together helps us have the courage we need in this world, and it widens our perspective and ability to discern the Spirit's guidance
320. Online opportunities for connection also work well for us either for the sharing of resources or for mutual support. At the same time we feel the vital importance of youth ministry and physical gatherings for young people.
321. A friend who has very little experience of wider bodies of Friends but had attended one regional gathering reflected that listening sessions such as this help her learn more and feel a part of what's happening. It also felt good to her to be with Friends with whom she has a strong and loving connection.

[Prompt 4]

322. Our Meeting has experienced a lengthy time of discernment which led to major change. The most important things were to listen carefully to one another, trusting that we could say anything, knowing that we were held in love by one

another, and to surrender the outcome to God, making ourselves ready to move as led. The marker for us as a Meeting and for some of us as individuals around clarity, is that we sense a growing energy and a sense of “coming into the Light together” when, after all our listening and discerning we understand the direction we are being led. There may still be some grief around losing the forms with which we were familiar, but there is also a sense of rightness and joy focusing on that which is unchanging. We’ve experienced it in our own Meeting and we trust the Spirit’s leading among us as a yearly meeting.

Burlington Friends Meeting, February 23, 2025

[Prompt 1]

- 323. Friends valued informal connections, the nurturing of families (dubbed club med for families 😊), and the spiritual process of business meeting.
- 324. One Friend had been attending in person since 1997, he shared his perspective of the many changes Sessions has had and the various places that Friends have gathered.
- 325. Concerns named were the barriers that many people are facing to attend a week long event. Those barriers include financial, needing time off from work, school, and life, as well as the resources to travel.

[Prompt 3]

- 326. Shorter gatherings for single adults/ longer time for families
- 327. Longer weekend - maybe additional time for families
- 328. Business part online and maybe all large group session
- 329. Piggyback onto other Friends gathering, ie: FGC
- 330. All Friends in attendance shared a desire to have an in person opportunity and to not get “rid” of sessions but more to look at how it can be structured differently so it helps it become more sustainable/ accessible.
- 331. Two areas of action Friends wanted to pursue is to encourage Friends who have grown children to volunteer more now than ever and to look at if BFM can increase financial support to NEYM.

Northwest Quarter, February 23, 2025

[Prompt 1]

332. More time is needed for business to be considered. This is the worshipful heart of our time together. Friends are not altogether comfortable with the conduct of Yearly Meeting business sessions.
333. Consider using smaller meeting places around the geographic reach of NEYM rather than college or university campuses. This would address concerns around travel distances and increased costs associated with renting out a larger facility. Perhaps hold such regional events at the same time and provide opportunities for virtual linking and participation across the various locations.
334. A “middle generation” of Friends (approximately 40-60 year-olds) seemed to be missing. What can be done to encourage their participation?
335. Find inclusive ways to accommodate younger people, especially in remote or hybrid events and programs. There is pain around this missing piece from recent sessions.
336. Better cultural diversity is needed, both in attendance and contact with cultural practices and ideas. Provide more opportunities for cross-cultural connections during meals and programs.
337. Sessions currently tries to accommodate too much in too little time. This can create feelings of stress, with people feeling the need to participate in everything. How to scale back the program to find its core?

[Prompt 2]

338. Regional events have done much for Friends. At this gathering of Friends in Northwest Quarterly Meeting, there was much positive feeling about what the Quarterly Meeting does to bring us together. Quarterly gatherings and programs provide support and opportunities for community for smaller meetings. (It was noted that this feeling varies somewhat in different Quarters.)

339. Annual sessions and Quarterly meetings allow Friends to gather ideas and bring them back to their home meetings. They also provide a flow of information and inspiration from the monthly meetings to Quarter and sessions.
340. Friends recall that NEYM committee days were much liked by those who participated, but recognize that organizing them under present circumstances can be very challenging, and generally requires significant travel.
341. Involvement in Northwest Quarter has given Friends a valued point of entrance to feeling at home in the larger gathering at Sessions.
342. Youth gatherings of NEYM have been much valued, as Northwest Quarter has had limited success holding youth programs and events in recent years.
343. Friends have enjoyed being involved in practical needs of the Yearly Meeting, for example working on the tech team.
344. A Friend referred to the experience of attending Sessions as an “annual booster shot” and “restorative worship.”
345. Resources found at the Yearly Meeting bookshop are appreciated. Making this available on line is not out of the question.
346. Bible Half Hours, early morning worship, and workshops are a powerful experiences for Friends who participate in them.
347. Other examples of smaller gatherings that have been important to Friends: Living Faith sessions; extended worship. (The latter is not specifically an NEYM event, but it meets the description.)

[Prompt 3]

348. Smaller group meetings at smaller venues, electronically interconnected. Technological challenges are recognized here, and Friends said in-person connection is treasured, offering people an opportunity to connect over meals and between workshops/business meetings.
349. Returning to a representative meeting structure. Advantages and disadvantages were discussed. Permanent Board (currently about fifty people broadly representing the span of the Yearly Meeting) has some features of this.

New Englanders feel a strong affection for a Town Meeting, representative approach. Smaller, representative meetings would be more financially sustainable, and could benefit the flow of information and ideas between Yearly Meeting and home meetings.

350. Friends expressed qualified acceptance of the possibility of Sessions on an every- other-year schedule. It was noted the FGC gathering is every other year, and perhaps NEYM annual sessions could be held in the off years.
351. Yearly meeting could provide more support to Quarterly meetings to “fill the gaps” for community, connection, programs and events.

[Prompt 4]

352. At our core are Quaker principles and practice.
353. Participation will tell us if what we are doing is working. Be open to continuing to adjust. This is a living practice. Participants, along with Quarterly and Monthly meetings, will give feedback.
354. Technology has been very helpful but often makes us uneasy. We were reminded that it may be a threat to the security of our personal and corporate consideration of business, and important, personal conversations are better had in person.
355. We may need to let go of things we don't have the technology, volunteers, energy or financial resources to continue.
356. Priorities sometimes are in conflict. Finding venues that are large enough to accommodate 100's of participants, and to meet the physical needs of attenders with mobility problems (e.g. elevators, ramps, etc.) draws us to venues like college campuses, but concerns about conflicts between our testimonies and actions of college and university administrations have distressed Friends.
357. Are younger Friends finding their needs understood and met?
358. There is tension around fear of change, and sadness for the past, balanced with hope to continue to practice in truth and faith.

[Prompt 5]

359. We share a concern for community while remaining faithful to core testimonies.
360. We need change but tend to resist it. There are tensions around ageism, economic circumstances, racism, and ability to travel, which need to be held. We need to listen to and have a meeting of our hearts.
361. Our values sometimes are in tension with each other. As we reach out for equality, we may sacrifice our sense of simplicity.
362. The economics of conducting Sessions as we have had them are unsustainable for the Yearly Meeting as a whole and for individuals who cannot afford the time and cost to participate fully. Friends are not easy with an economic model which allows participation only to those with the financial means and time to be there.
363. We want to keep our sense of community even as we can't always be face to face. Electronic means to do this are helpful but not always satisfying.
364. We profoundly believe youth in the Yearly Meeting community should be able to thrive.

[Prompt 6]

1. Those participating thanked Northwest Quarter and New England Yearly Meeting for the opportunity to share deeply with regards to NEYM Sessions, and finding ways to continue inviting each other into our shared sacred journey

Westport Monthly Meeting, February 23, 2025

[Prompt 1]

365. Over time the duration of Sessions has become burdensome, especially for families and young adults. This can create a situation where only a small demographic of Friends can attend and may prohibit others.
366. Workshops are the best part. They allow for meeting of Friends, establishing connections and building trust.

367. There is a sense that Sessions has evolved to try to do everything for everybody. This creates a somewhat frantic atmosphere and an intensity rather than a centered calm. Also this carries over into a more chaotic pre-Sessions organizing. One new attending Friend felt lost and overwhelmed at Sessions.
368. One Friend felt that Zoom with break out rooms works better for larger gatherings.
369. One Friend who has attended two Sessions felt the experience was a mixed bag. Mixing with Friends from around the region was very valuable and would like more opportunities for that. However some Permanent Board issues crept in and made some gatherings uncomfortable.

[Prompt 2]

370. Overall experiences and Sessions in particular are supported by gatherings that occur all year around. They allow for the building of relationships, the maintenance of connections and continued attention on issues. There is then a more centered and prepared arrival at Sessions.
371. Youth programs maintain connections between meetings.
372. Meeting Care day proved very beneficial.

[Prompt 3]

373. Don't get rid of aspects of Sessions, just reinvent them. Perhaps instead of too many workshops there can be an area of "table clinics". These would be displays surrounding topics or meetings that Friends can go through at their own pace, spending time and getting in depth with issues that particularly speak to them.
374. Can NEYM establish a more permanent structure/facility so that yearly planning is more streamlined?
375. Have an online resource for schedule changes and updates to provide less confusion.
376. Provide more direct and nurturing things for families throughout the year.

377. Shorten the duration of Sessions and utilize that time for business and essential activities that require focus and discernment and move other aspects to one day events throughout the year.
378. Business needs to be in person as much as possible. It is very difficult to be truly present with fellow Friends on Zoom. There is too great a risk of Friends feeling misunderstood or passed over. Our Monthly Meeting for Business does not work hybrid. We have a system of utilizing Zoom when appropriate and in person gathering when a particularly weighty issue requires mutual support and close discernment.
379. Need unstructured time to just “hang out” and be present with each other.
380. Keep innovating and trying things with Sessions structure. Don’t be afraid to have something not work well. All outcomes carry lessons.
381. Perhaps an endowment can be established to which Monthly Meetings can contribute to help with financial shortfalls rather than identifying specific meeting attendance and individual shortfalls. An appeal can be sent out once a shortfall is identified.

[Prompt 4]

382. Indicators for success or failure of any changes will revolve around demographics. Are all Friends being reached by these changes? How many new Friends, families or young adult Friends are showing up? A recent Family Retreat filled to waiting list in 3 days demonstrating successful outreach and structuring.

[Prompt 5]

We found unity in:

383. Shortening the duration of Sessions
384. Not trying to do too many things
385. Separate some aspects of Sessions into year round events

[Prompt 6]

386. Much gratitude for the incredible work the Sessions Vision Planning Working Group, especially the preparatory packet which allowed us to accomplish so much more in two hours. It brought great clarity to the issues facing NEYM regarding Sessions.
387. Appreciation for the insights of new attenders.
388. Regret that more seasoned Friends didn't participate in this Listening Group.
389. Hope that this process helps NEYM hold Sessions together given inevitable change and that the process builds trust and bonds.

Fresh Pond Monthly and Three Rivers Monthly Meetings, 2/27/25

[Editor's note: Two sets of notes were submitted for this group. Although they are repetitive we have opted to include them both.]

[Prompt 1]

390. Alarmed/unclear how no mention made of how discernment by QMs fits in and leads up to the annual corporate gathering for corporate discernment.
391. One difficulty is that Friends bring to YM an increasingly wide variety of issues they want to address. Too much gets jammed in. Long complicated agendas. Hugely complicated logistics – trying to do everything. What is the **core** that YM is *for*?
392. Important keep some time for business sessions, but it could be more focused. Much time is spent acknowledging work done. The work is important, but often not requiring the engagement of the body. Engaging business can help keep our spiritual life focused. Doctrine of Discovery – Apology – QIBS: a clear through line, see Spirit working on us over time. Need time to get to know each other in order to do business together well. Have a limited number of priority decisions to focus on each year in business.
393. My magic wand would shorten summer sessions, with less business, on one or two topics, spend time doing pastoral care together, bonding/socializing/dancing/playing with kids
394. What I remember from YM are moments of getting to know each other, Bible half-hours & spiritual discussion groups, CVQM was a lively quarter, an

important part of my life, more than YM. Is there a way to shorten YM by having QMs do more preliminary work?

395. It would be healthy if Salem Q was revived. We benefit from meeting people from other places. It is easy to “other” people you don’t know. We get to know one another in anchor groups and lunch tables and discussion groups more than YM business sessions.
396. Been to multiple YMs. Not all YMs are shorter than ours. Reaction to the background material – in the historical part, the residential conference model played an important role in creating a thriving family ministry. Family neighborhood, connecting with other parents, was really important – may be an important effect of FGC gathering on YM. Now, with fewer and fewer families, & aging YM population. YM is important mechanism for family engagement and formation, as well as discernment.

[Prompt 2]

397. QMs are important for they approve recording/recognition of gifts of ministry
398. Living Faith gatherings have been a remarkable spring for my faith, exciting, useful workshops, conversations over meals
399. M&C was important for networking across the YM (beyond the QM)
400. I feel life consistently in opportunities to get together in person, in a variety of ways & contexts; having opportunities to have deep and meaningful conversations with people; important to have multiple routes for people to become involved in YM in significant ways – not just through nominating committee (which is such a narrow filter)

[Prompt 3]

401. I like best the version with shorter on-site, meeting every year. NEYM felt like a giant family gathering in the 90’s
402. An additional model: Intermountain YM begins with time for just workshops, fellowship, families for a few days, then a short intense period of (hybrid) discernment that’s all business all the time, with childcare.

403. Like the idea of dedicated space for families & pre-retreat for families. Thinking of making discernment for 7 generations in the future, what does sustainable mean for Quakerism? Important to include all the generations.
404. I like the idea of two shorter sessions, with real space between them. Perhaps long-weekends?
405. We are one of the larger YMs. The difference of scale makes things more complicated. There are dwindling numbers of families with deep generational roots in NEYM, brought continuity. Need to try new things, as we have before. Perhaps weekend long regional gatherings, building connections over the course of the year would be good?
406. FGC commitments kept away from NEYM Sessions. Returned to painful disruption at YM around FUM personnel policy. Who are we and what are we doing? What is more accessible and needed is the QM. Salem QM was once very active. Quaker Studies program. Cultivating, nurturing personal relationships. Accessibility has life. Opportunities for worship and spiritually formative experiences within the intimacy of fellowship. Opportunities to be gathered in worship, plenaries. What happened to M&C – continues to be a loss. What if we could revive that?
407. Maybe create a revised permanent board that every MM can send 2 reps to, and they meet 4 times/year, and have Annual Sessions. If something doesn't get finished, it can get carried over to 3 months later instead of needing to wait until 12 months later.
408. PB meetings are open to everybody – and the atmosphere is very closed; treating PB as a committee of the whole might work some healthy change there. PB is too static.
409. YM used to have quarterly committee days; if we want to promote QMs or other regional groups, need to be careful not to fill calendar with YM events
410. Do we have more structure than is useful, so we spend time trying to feed the structure? What if we didn't feed it?

[Prompt 5]

411. I hear several speaking of the narrow filtering of Nom Com; of trying to squeeze in too much to a once/year meeting.

[Prompt 6]

412. I wonder how in this visioning we are addressing anti-racism and repair of ruptures due to conflict?

413. What would you miss if you didn't have YM?

414. Noticing a disconnect in myself. Given the context of the world around us and our society being attacked, I feel a disconnect between feeling this visioning is good stuff – and wondering how are we preparing for a greatly changed political landscape? Are we trying to envision what we would like to be in a world that will no longer exist?

415. Looking at indicators, remembering / what came to mind was the challenge around the YM budget this past Sessions. Budgets are moral documents (what we value, where our energy flows) Do we need to reassess what we are doing, if people aren't donating because there isn't life? I wonder about the many assumptions in gathering as a YM in this way – about the way the world is, and what we really are? In the long term for the RSoF in NE and beyond, and for faithfulness, maybe what will serve us isn't one of these scenarios at all?

416. There's a mood in the world of "change for the sake of change" – seeing institutions being swept away too quickly. Some resemblances between YM and USA. Let's look for where the life is, yes; and let's not set things down just because they are old and heavy. Sometimes old and heavy things have real use. Uneasy with making drastic shifts too lightly, especially when a lot of us feel Friends are our grounding when everything else is shifting so fast.

417. What would you miss if you didn't have YM? I am feeling under attack, with so much in air, getting together is going to be a huge important part for YM to play. The more you can draw people to attend, the more people can help each other see we are bigger than we seem. Sessions as a time for spiritual support to help each other get thru this.

[The following notes were taken by the second note-taker]

[Prompt 1]

418. In looking over the materials I found it very focused on wanting to nurture local meetings but didn't find language about Quarterly Meetings and potentially having regional gatherings. I don't see where the Quarterly Meeting fits into discernment How will we make corporate discernment as a body going forward? Is the YM intending to keep the Quarterly Meeting structure?
419. Looking back over a bunch of years I've had a growing sense that as we become more integrated as a society as a whole, Friends bring to the YM an increasingly large number of concerns that we want the YM to address. It takes up huge amounts of time and money because we're trying to do everything and we can't. Maybe we need to be more discerning about what sessions are for - and not try to encompass every need of every person for every issue to be included.
420. It's important for us to keep some time for business sessions but we need to be more focused! There's a lot on the agenda that isn't necessary for us to have on the agenda; it's more for people to be recognized for what they're working on. It's also important for us to be together to get to know each other without doing business so that when we DO get together for business, we know each other and can trust each other more. *That* will require pruning the business agenda.
421. My magic wand would make the whole thing shorter. Also getting to know each other, ice cream socials, contra dancing — the stuff we'd all enjoy.
422. What I recall as being most fruitful for me are the moments of getting to know each other; also the Bible half hours and the spiritual discussion groups that would arise out of those opportunities. How much of this should the Quarters really be doing? Is there a way to have the Quarters do more of the preliminary work?
423. It would be healthy if our Quarter (Salem) would be revived. But I think it is good for us to meet people from other places, who practice Quakerism differently than we do here in our Quarter.

424. I've been to sessions in a number of YMs and I found that some of the descriptions in this document of other YMs aren't as I've found them. I go to YM for the opportunity to worship and to listen. How is the Divine calling us to do and be? To act and speak? Those questions have a lot of energy for me.
425. I don't think that all YMs are shorter than ours. The one part of the background material, where they talked about the multi-day conference model, I'm not sure they named the importance of that in establishing a thriving family ministry. In my experience *that* has been very important. It may be part of FGC's effect on YM gatherings. I also don't see named the fact that we have fewer and fewer families coming and we have a greater and greater aging population as a whole. If we want a mechanism for family engagement, it feels like the health of the YM is deeply connected to family formation. That feels like it's being left out.

[Prompt 2]

426. Quarterly meetings are a place where recording ministers can be brought forward to YMs. They are one of the places where ministers can be recorded and tended. If we don't tend to that, we will lose that part of being Quakers.
427. I never used to attend the Living Faith gatherings, but I've been going in the last few years and I've found them a remarkable spring for my faith. I have found they bring me joy.
428. I've found great nourishment and fellowship in the Quarterly Meetings I've gone to. I've also found that some of the ways initiative is taken by people not already inside the YM structure sometimes get blocked. In starting new initiatives, it's important for people to consider who they might be unintentionally discounting and what that means. The YM M&C was an important way of networking across the entire YM and now it's missing.
429. The place where life is, is in the getting together in person and in the opportunity to get to know each other in a variety of ways; in the opportunities to get to know each other in different contexts. It's important to have multiple routes for people to move into deeper involvement in multiple ways because

nominating committee depends on who you know and that's a very narrow filter. We need to be broader than that.

[Prompt 3]

430. I like the idea of having sessions be shorter and on-site, and I like the idea of having it every year. We started coming in 1980 and there's very few years that we've missed. When our kids were growing up it felt like a family gathering. Going to YM was our family vacation for all the years our kids were growing up.
431. I am interested in investigating the model that is used by places like Inter-Mountain Meeting. They gather for a few days just for workshops and getting to know each other; then they have a few days of just business. I wonder about having a space where folks can just *be* with each other, that's just optional, and then having a part where this discernment process happens, and maybe the discernment happens in person and online.
432. FGC has a pre-retreat for people of color that I'd been thinking about, and hearing the above model makes me excited.
433. One way that some YMs spread the corporate discernment out is to have two shorter gatherings - like a weekend in the fall and spring. Also, before FGC became a residential model on college campuses, they met in Cape May and people rented houses. I could see how something like that might work if it was at a place where there was a concentration of Quakers and people could camp or have other options for housing.
434. I'm wondering about the assumption of sustainability in terms of affordability. I'm wondering what *sustainable* means for Quakers in New England, in terms of passing Quakerism down to future generations? Anything that does not take into account all the generations should be a no-go.
435. I'm not sure why but the notion of having two shorter sessions in a years time is very attractive to me. Five days is too exhausting. Having a couple of long weekends might be easier to plan. Peoples' spiritual energy might be more sustained that way.

436. We are bigger than most YMs. That difference of scale makes things more complicated. I'm also one of the last of a dying breed. When we went out visit the Newport Meeting House I knew that my ancestors had been in that room worshipping and discerning. All those people who came before us were experimenting with what worked for them and then refining that. So maybe more frequent, shorter meetings over the course of the entire year is something we should try.
437. My experience is SO varied from years of attending FGC Gathering and conferences. My experience of YM was painful around the FUM policy. So I resonate with the revival of the quarter. And I don't have much interest in being in dorm rooms anymore. My interest is in accessibility in smaller settings. Whatever we can do to bring ourselves into the intimacy without the endless complexity would be good. And then we go home at night, having had time to be really gathered on worship. I also find that speaking to whatever happened around the loss of YM M&C would help with our sense belonging.
438. There's just so much we're trying to squeeze into meeting for business so I'm thinking about a revised PB. Every meeting could send two reps. And they could meet four times a year. Then we could meet once a year at Sessions. So that's five times a year and we don't have to squeeze all our business into one week in the summer..
439. PB meetings are open to everybody. I've been once and I didn't like it very much. The atmosphere around PB is very closed even though it's supposed to be open. Treating PB as a committee of the whole might work some healthy change there. I'm not speaking to oppose to what was suggested suggest above but I think we could create a little breathing room without restructuring. Friends could just open it up a bit.
440. When I was going to PB it *was* open but then there was a cultural shift towards PB members being lifted up as the something like legal representatives.
441. I want to notice how it doesn't seem like there's a lot of emphasis on Quarterly Meetings because the YM has Quarterly Committee Days, which

doesn't leave much time for actual Quarterly Meetings. If the YM is serious about supporting Quarters, we can't fill up the calendar with YM events.

442. I think trying to have four business meetings a year, that might be too big a bite. Also, you can't just keep adding more and more things on PB's plate. What are more ways that we can work with one-another and nurture one-another, without adding more tasks for the staff to do?

443. A question I ask myself: do we have more structure than is useful? Do we feed it because it's there? What if we didn't feed it?

[Prompt 6]

444. I'm focused on how people have access to participate in nurturing connection to local meetings, and on who we say we are as Quakers and what we imagine we are. I didn't go to Sessions last year because of deep harm that has been done to me and others. I'm trying to imagine what it will mean for me and others to show up again and how these proposed structures will affect that?

445. I'm noticing a disconnect in myself. I've been involved in YM for a long time and normally I'd be all excited about this idea of re-visioning the YM. But given the state of the world around us (and for me this is a very personal observation), I wonder how are we preparing to deal with a greatly changed environment? I wonder, are we currently trying to envision how we want to be in a world that no longer exists?

446. What comes to mind is the challenge around the YM budget and the sense that budgets are moral documents. They talk about where our energy flows and what we value. Do we need to reassess what we're doing? Are people not donating because there isn't life? Do we need to reassess what our priorities are? I wonder in the long term and for faithfulness — maybe something that is not one of these scenarios at all is what will serve us.

447. At my job we have been reorganized a number of times and one of the things I've seen is that we have experienced change for the sake of change. I want us to be careful to look for where the life is and not just throw things away because

they're old and heavy. Sometimes old things are useful. I am uneasy with making drastic shifts too lightly, especially when the world is changing so fast.

448. What comes through to me is that especially now when there is such a sense of being under attack, getting together is going to be hugely important. And the aspects of how it's structured may not matter as much as working on the spiritual aspects of how to get through this. I think it would be a real gift to the Body if we can provide less busy-ness and more grounding to be faithful.

Hartford Monthly Meeting, March 2, 2025

[Prompt 1]

449. Strong influence of children at Sessions and China Camp - Spirit and Testimonies
450. Appreciate this discernment process we are using; Quakerly; Deeper wisdom
451. Sessions is the highlight of the year; Deep rich experience; Time of bonding with others
452. Wonderful clerking of Business Meetings
453. Power of Respectfulness (John Calvi, Greg Williams and others)
454. Since 1611 NEYM has had some sort of annual gathering. We owe it to our forebears to continue
455. The history in the readings stood out. Prior to 1970's the gathering was much smaller
456. Mesmerized by Youth Programs
457. Incredible Community at Sessions
458. First started attending online during the pandemic
459. Combination of hybrid and in-person allows many to attend
460. Bible Half Hours have been so important to me
461. Appreciate reading the background materials and the immense amount of work in their preparation
462. One family said timing is difficult but was able to attend one day recently and it was an amazing single day

- 463. Struggle with Zoom for building community but great for getting business done; less expensive
- 464. Documents represent an immense amount of work.
- 465. Magic wand- NEYM would have our own centrally located Conference Center which we could use & also rent out
- 466. Magic wand- Sessions Youth programs on weekends so more families could participate; many parents need to work during the week
- 467. Magic wand - In person Sessions opens up the sense of the entire Yearly Meeting; worshipping with 300 - 400 people is extraordinary. We need to preserve the sense of community
- 468. Bible Half Hours have been so important to me (and to others).

[Prompt 2]

- 469. Yearly Meeting is a year-round thing
- 470. Permanent Board has taken on more of the Business: maybe more in the future.
- 471. Living Faith Gatherings, Meeting Care Days and The Gathered Meeting at Mt. Toby have all been meetings some of us have attended
- 472. Youth Programs help our children form their Quaker values although challenging for children with special needs.
- 473. Currently, 7-8 HMM youth are involved in retreats
- 474. Workshop on Best Practices in Nominating- great experience working with other NEYM Friends
- 475. All the NEYM staff give so much
- 476. Committee Days used to keep Friends connected

[Prompt 3]

- 477. Youth Programs, Youth Programs must be included!
- 478. Shorter on-site long weekend; Please do not separate children and adults; Seems doable
- 479. Provides a much needed break for parents

- 480. Long weekend option opens it up for more families and working people
- 481. Financially, long weekend makes sense.
- 482. In-person overnight is vital
- 483. Camping options help at NEYM Sessions
- 484. Need to make more Friends aware that “Yearly Meeting is us.”
- 485. Being able to attend of Zoom helps if spouse does not want to attend Sessions
- 486. Need to build up Quarterly Meetings; Quarterly Meetings have potential for greater community
- 487. Shorter Sessions; Expand Affordable Living Faith Gatherings.
- 488. Business online and Fellowship in Person?
- 489. Maybe alternate year is doable?
- 490. Maintain FUM & FGC connection which facilitates learning about other types of Quakers. NEYM is more “mixed” than Philadelphia.

[Prompt 4]

- 491. Friends must feel part of the decision making
- 492. Increase in family participation
- 493. Financial stability

[Prompt 5]

- 494. Community Building
- 495. How meaningful Sessions is and how much we have gotten out of it
- 496. Youth and Youth Programs
- 497. Shorter Sessions
- 498. Importance of Congregation
- 499. Some sort of hybrid option
- 500. Tension: Balance between business and community

[Prompt 6]

- 501. Gratitude for willingness to consider change

502. Shorter Sessions will be a motivator to do other NEYM things throughout the year.
503. Really appreciate the process; feel included.
504. Deepest worship ever was worship at Sessions.
505. Small sessions/meetings at Yearly Meeting Sessions have been really impactful.

Friends Meeting at Cambridge (MA), March 2, 2025

[Prompt 1]

506. In the statistics and history, the dramatic drop in the number of people between 41 and 65 that have recently been at sessions. Because those are parents and those are people who can shoulder responsibilities.
507. MAGIC WAND: Make it free and financially supported. I would send buses from every part of New England to bring people to sessions and that would determine if transportation is the issue.
508. What stood out to me was growing up and going to yearly meeting every year of my life. It continues to be a magical transforming place. It was a lifesaver in my teenage years. Recently yearly meeting does not feel that way. It is sad that we have become so professionalized as a culture as a society. What are our priorities and how to decide what to spend her money on?
509. MAGIC WAND: I don't think there's a solution, but it would be radical to just keep on going until we're broke.
510. The greatest impact of yearly meeting on my life is the relationship we built with another family the first time I attended a yearly meeting with my children. I did not get this same kind of nourishment from yearly meeting as a child. I feel that smaller groups work better for me. I still find from recent meetings that the personal connections we make there are the most important.
511. MAGIC WAND: As a family, trying to juggle money, time and the need to visit family that we all want to have. The magic wand would be to give everybody a little more space in their lives.

512. MAGIC WAND: I'd love to have a place where there's a bike path and people come with a lot to share and we have massages at night and young friends organize an all night dance. But I think what I really want is a lot more acceptance: learning to carve a path without the pressures of growing up, or producing, or proving yourself. Have it on a coral reef where everyone has a raft, like a life preserver where we can dive in and out of.
513. MAGIC WAND: Sessions should continue to be a place especially for Quakers to connect with others outside of their own monthly meeting.
514. MAGIC WAND: I've longed for a more intimate meeting for business. The ones we have feel impersonal, even though we mostly know each other. I once had a kind of waking dream of meeting for business in one of those big rooms that could be a basketball court or cafeteria just a short stage of about a foot high to be visible to friends seated in a kind of horseshoe so that the maximum number of people are close to the clerks and see the clerks directly. A couple of yearly meetings ago something went wrong with the recording. And they had to take the minutes during each item of business and read them back rather than give the recording clerks time to put them together and read back at a subsequent meeting. I was amazed at how much better the meeting for business went. Without the recording, we were all more focused on what was being said in the meeting.

[Prompt 2]

515. Revitalize the quarterly meetings, which have been on life support for years. The advantage of being simpler/easier to get together.
516. I found that I am hungry for some programming, for some sort of programmed worship. I have loved the Bible half hours. I have loved the singing together. There has been some wonderful ministry that is so deep and been so carefully tended and offered. The regional thing that's been happening that has a lot of meaning in life for me right now is the extended worship that NEYM has been sponsoring throughout the year. It's not the business, but there's some ways that their ministry gets to me and there's some different kinds of worship and ministry that happens in those regional gatherings.

517. I get a wider sense of Quakerism. People who venture beyond their own meeting to a larger Quaker gathering have an interest in what Quaker is in a wider sense. The exposure influences reassessment of our own practices. It takes us out of the rhythms and rituals that are “encrusted.” Exposure to other meetings make me ask: Is what we are doing really Quaker? What constitutes Quaker? I feel connected to the wider “movement.” This is the way the spirit grows the community.

518. Regional Quaker gatherings are a safe place to explore identity and explore rebellion and defiance against the standard Quaker way. As a young parent raising kids I found that regional meetings were really great. but I think one of the biggest things I'd like to do is to find when I'm going to another regional group. What are the local Friends doing with the local people? Not staying in our insular little Quaker bubble. We did this at Philadelphia yearly meeting long ago: we would go out attached to one of the local meetings during the day and work with a kind of Habitat for Humanity kind of experience and then in the evening come back in your meeting circle and discuss what it's like to be out in the world as a Quaker. I remember for many years, a couple of us would go to local Spanish-speaking evangelical Quaker Church, and that felt like I was at a regional gathering. Maybe there are friends out there who are farmers or living on the edge and aren't so comfortable. That's what I would like out of my regional gathering to meet with Quakers who are doing justice work solidarity with immigrants.

519. I have only gone to one regional gathering. And it was because I was involved in a workshop, which was very successful. I think partly because it was not at yearly meeting sessions, where people have so many things to compete for their attention. There were only a few workshops. people came just to do that workshop that day. It didn't do. What yearly meeting does it did something different. I didn't form new relationships on the basis of those seven hours together. I think it was effective around a specific topic.

[Prompt 3]

520. Retain in-person connection somehow in any version because that gives us visceral connection with each other. I want to know how others have shorter sessions and do all the business.

521. Can we do the meeting for business by zoom, but gather in person for those necessary human spaces in programmed worship and in between workshops?

522. We could meet in the Boston area or in southern Maine area, or northern part of Vermont and meet in those places for a day or two, then caravan to yearly meeting. It extends the amount of time and it's a building process, starting

locally and building momentum, and representing those who would be unable to go to the yearly meeting. It would be a send-off from these areas to yearly meeting. I love carpooling and the community aspect of this idea.

523. Or organize buses to meet at a “work area” to live among, e.g. farmers who produce the food for our meals. I don’t want to go to a yearly meeting and feel like I’m in “an airport” [or conference center?] , but i want to be grounded in a new space that gives us insight into the holy presence that is there.

524. Have two gatherings: 1) a representative gathering to do business (like a permanent board, but different). And we, as a monthly meeting, would support our representatives in a different way than we support those who go to yearly meeting as it is currently. 2) a shorter, more focused gathering; the kind where we can make those personal connections, where we bring up topics or have a worship sharing of two hours about such topics. A bit more free-flowing, and definitely include the teens.

[Prompt 4]

525. When kids want to keep coming back and make these wonderful relationships and connections, something is happening that is holy. I think there should be a lot of focus on that because we need them (young Friends).

526. As Sessions is reimagined, it’s important to have planning by younger families, younger generations. I have listened to a lot of nostalgia, as most of you have been longtime Yearly Meeting participants. I hear that the community and personal connections should never be let go of. Anything reimagined has to preserve those connections. But what has change is how those connections will be formed in the future. How do we find a way to re-create those feelings in a modern technological time-challenged world? We need input from those who are constrained: what time slots and locations or formats would work for you as a young single or partnered Friend, professional, or with a growing family?

527. Let go of decision-making, approving nominations to committee, “business.” Spend time on worship and noticing the new life rising among Quakers.

528. On reading epistles on the final day: I liked hearing them, but I think it's way too much. Seven different epistles from seven different voices in one final worship day. And so I'd like, especially the adults, not to read the whole epistle and getting it approved—not taking up so much time with our own words talking to ourselves and doing more action and being outside (outdoors?) more time for discernment around whatever issues come up. It's OK talking about reparations and spending a lot of time in a way that's more head-oriented. It's OK talking about noticing patterns of faithfulness. And we have tried to eliminate some of the automatic business, but I think we have to do more and more time for worship.
529. Another indicator that we are on the right path is that our yearly meeting staff doesn't feel completely overwhelmed. there should be enough resources that there's joy in the work even if there's really a ton of work. And it has to be sustainable, I think not just financially sustainable but energetically sustainable. How do we have a yearly meeting that uses fewer material resources, like energy resources? How do we have a yearly meeting where we really connect about the things that are critical to living into the reality that's changing around us? how can I think it can't be responsive if it's too hard to make it happen.
530. I realize I'm making some comparison between the situation of our Yearly Meeting sessions and Friends World Committee for Consultation. and it has some of the same dilemmas, and I have felt some of the same inspiration by going to those gatherings as I do by going to yearly meeting sessions. Then it was decided for various ecological and financial reasons that this last world gathering would be representative. Each yearly meeting would send one or two people and they would try to encourage young adult adults to go. So it happened, but I haven't heard much from it. because it was going on the same time as our yearly meeting sessions, I tried logging on for the hybrid, but it didn't work. I feel less connected with Friends World Committee, and the reason I was connected with Friends World Committee is that I actually went to those gatherings and I met people and I have faces of people from around the world that I feel connected to.

Prompt 5 Omitted due to time

[Prompt 6]

531. I think one of the things that the (YM?) staff is grappling with: how is this leaven for the whole if we're going to invest all this time and effort, how does leaven the entire yearly meeting? Is it worth it? I think if you're going to have a yearly meeting you have to have sessions. Or else it's something else but how does Sessions leaven the whole of the yearly meeting. I don't know the answer to that one actually. How do we produce something that leavens the whole yearly meeting that has some of the things we love about Sessions?
532. I've wondered for 35 years why so few people from our monthly meeting are interested in yearly meeting or yearly meeting activities. And maybe the answers are there. Asking those people why they have no interest in going? What has prevented them?
533. I want to say how being in this conversation, I have been on this journey of gratitude and want to express how much people have fed me and given to me. Yearly Meeting can be an instrument of connecting individuals among monthly meetings. I'm thinking of a person who was able to stay with us here while she needed medical care and many people in YM got together to make this happen. I knew this person for 30 years, not well—only because they were “just” part of YM.
534. The image that is coming to me right now is a really big long, curving line of us holding hands with the earth quaking underneath us, and holding on and holding on. Things are going to change, but let us not lose hold of one another. Let us cling to each other while the ground shifts under our feet.
535. It seems like Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York have developed a sense of yearly meeting sessions ongoing. There's a fall, spring, summer session. That's how I think New York thinks of it. And so the yearly meeting has authority to act in all those places. I don't believe they have another layer of permanent board in NY. For years Philadelphia meeting did not have a residential session. In many ways, the Friends General Conference was the residential session of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. And FGC now is struggling with its own sense of what it's doing and where it's going. Losing money as well. but I think the idea of spreading out

the various business of the sessions throughout the year and highlighting the summer as more of a family time and the business would be the meta-discernment. The one year that we successfully did a whole different kind of business we had a whole different kind of meeting for worship to hear God's call. And all we did was sit there and worship. And then we had minutes of exercises of what came out of each of these sessions. We did it. I'm not sure what happened, but just something like that that would really grip a group, something that unusual, something that would be not your usual nominating or budget, for example, but some focus on where we are in the world today. How are we as Meetings responding? And it can get more focused than that. It doesn't have to be as long. it could be fewer days I think. Just shake it up because with this school that we're at now, the university that we're at now closing its doors to us, I don't know how many times I and others searched for venues in New England for our program. It is impossible to find everything we want. You've got to compromise somewhere. So if we start from scratch with the program and find a place and work the program to the place, it might be different than the other way around. so those are just some thoughts that I've got about what would change could change. I imagine it's going to change anyway. It doesn't matter what we say today, but it has to change.

Storrs Friends Meeting, 3/2/25

[Prompt 1]

536. A sense of grief at the potential loss of the richness of NEYM sessions. Importance of spiritual nurture in both adult and youth programs. Change is inevitable.
537. Having served on the NEYM Development Committee where we worked hard on fundraising to support the growing staff needed to support the objectives of the Yearly Meeting, it was difficult to see a new administration run a deficit budget. Importance of fiscal responsibility and paying attention to leadings ahead of time.

538. Attended NEYM sessions in the early 1990's during a period of personal difficulty, stress and upset. It was helpful to find a group of people who were supportive of the kind of person I was – people I didn't know but still were supportive. Had no idea before reading the advance materials that the Yearly Meeting started as only a business meeting. Don't know much about the current structure, so can't speak to what could be changed.
539. Attended Yearly Meeting sessions very regularly for many years, then stopped altogether for various reasons. In terms of what needs to change, this is not quality improvement process but a "what are we going to do next" questions. This is more of a re-invention. Sense of loss but also thinking about inventing something new can be good. What are the really core elements for so many years that have given people joy, personal strength and community strength? Identifying what crystal would be left after going through the crucible. What gifts came out of the old way of doing it now that we have to invent a new way?
540. Have not attended NEYM sessions but have gone to NYYM sessions and FGC gatherings. There was a sense of freedom and safety, a group togetherness with people I didn't see often. What stands out from the advance documents is the decline in attendance in general and specifically in NEYM. Important to make sure people can be present in the way they want. Attending in person should not be selective or out of reach. Need to maintain a strong element of fellowship; there is a need to do business, but should leave lots of room for programming around fellowship.
541. Many parallels between what NEYM is going through and what our meeting is going through – same struggles, worries, grief.

[Prompt 2]

542. My experience of CVQM is kind of the reverse of my experience of NEYM. I never used to go to CVQM but am going more now to help fulfill the commitment that SFM has to the Quarter. One key element is the opportunity to sit with Friends from other meetings with a mix of familiarity. Recognize the importance

of fellowship time and keep structure (logistics, etc.) to a minimum allowing time for fellowship. See what happens with minimal planning.

543. Society at large is reflected in our meeting. Quakers emphasize the importance of corporate discernment but society focuses much more on the individual. We are Spirit-led - silence, open ourselves to what is within and around us. Example of discernment on same gender marriage many years ago that we benefited from. Discernment began in one meeting then came to the Quarter. When a request for same gender marriage came to our meeting, it was scary: what is marriage? etc. It was important to change my mind. Paradox – the importance of sitting with it individually and in community. The process took 4-5 years, beginning with the individual discernment, moving to the monthly meeting, the quarter corporate discernment, NEYM corporate discernment, then spread to other yearly meetings. This is the essence of Quaker discernment.
544. Regional meetings are important for sharing fellowship as well as more focused discussion, such as Peace and Social Concerns, M&C, etc. Important to hear the challenges, joys, etc. that other meetings face and also what they are doing.

[Prompt 3

545. Not ideal but more sustainable to hold the entire group together in-person. Limited housing or shorter on-site options still hold the key elements that I value. Meetings in CVQM take turns hosting quarterly meeting. Might the quarters take turns hosting Yearly Meeting?
546. If sessions are not in 1 place, easier for people to commute or take time off. Wary of families only option because we need intergenerational aspect. The youth programs are formative and important. It takes people time to find their way back to Quakers after leaving the youth programs. Young families also don't necessarily have the money to attend or to take time off from work.
547. The every-other year option has pluses and minuses, but overall didn't seem to work for FGC. Hard to keep track of what's happening in the off year. In the

“off year”, perhaps could have a smaller meeting just mostly for business. This would be hard on staff and clerks because they would miss the fun part.

548. Our sustainable structures of listening to God corporately will change as the situation changes and as we change. Importance of elders who have a sense of what’s going on in the corporate body. Where are the young adults? They are establishing families, careers, etc. Limited time and also feeling like the adults don’t listen to them.
549. Maybe a more radical change is required. One of the aims of sessions is business and to get feedback from as much of the whole of New England as possible. Zoom has the potential to include more people. Some kind of fellowship could be included on Zoom. Sessions could then happen at any time of year. Some Quaker groups like youth benefit from being in-person. Perhaps gather in-person every 5 years and then provide a lot of other on-line opportunities to consider business or particular concerns. Provide smaller regional gatherings. Combination of meeting less frequently and more Zoom especially for business. Zoom is more accessible to more people.

[Prompt 4]

550. Indicators that show how well and frequently and deeply we are able to connect with Friends from other meetings and quarters. New mission – instead of a large organized gathering, provide facilitation around a particular topic, facilitate togetherness. Let go of organizing except for perhaps meals
551. Move business to virtual or regular hub versions with affinity groups, retreats, facilitation, finding support not only in attendance but reaching a variety of people. Need for strong pay scales, not just pay -as-led: example: camping, only some meals, etc. This can be ‘othering’. Accessibility is important and match to what people need. Indicators of what’s working – try a few different models. Weekend or quarter retreats. Experiment. Opportunities to see what indicators matter and actually work.
552. Everyone not in residence at the exact same location. Let go of very organized workshops. Know that whatever we design will change, remember

experimenting. Won't be perfect for everyone. Doesn't have to be perfect, but should be as accessible and inclusive as possible. Streamline what is offered and sponsored – people can organize on their own.

553. Committee reports and staff reports are interesting. Permanent board seems to be taking more authority and more projects, more reports and arguments. Where does authority rest and how do we cut some things out?

554. Drop or play with the idea of not having Yearly Meeting always be the host. Experiment – try different things. Example: all planning, organizing and scheduling of sessions rotates around. Keep expectations realistic. Live with whatever you can't pull off. Accept that it would be different every time.

[Prompt 5]

555. Unity: basic changes need to be made. Struggle between individual values and corporate discernment. Need for individual and community support – how to articulate that and move together.

556. Importance of fellowship and youth programming.

557. Have committee work done separately on-line and not included in in-person sessions. Not downplay the importance of committee work, but just have it done apart from sessions.

558. Look forward to staff reports

559. Importance of memorial minutes to hear together

560. Tension: Personal struggle with virtual vs. in-person discernment. Can it be done effectively on-line?

561. Tension in the frequency of meeting annually, biennially, every 5 years. Hard to build bonds that can be maintained if we don't meet annually.

562. How important is it that Yearly meeting be the same kind of experience every year? Some aspects need to be the same but maybe other aspects don't.

563. Innovation of 1-day meetings a few times a year – does this support the annual sessions or is it just more work for staff?

[Prompt 6]

564. Pray that whatever shape sessions takes, it will strengthen our own Spirit, our community, and the Spirit of our community; that as many Friends as possible can participate; and we take that strength from the gathering whatever it looks like.
565. We are a small group with deep roots. This has been a meaningful discussion and joyful time.
566. My hope is that permanent board will listen to the feedback from the visioning sessions and set fiscal deliberations toward sustainability
567. Hold the NEYM staff in the Light as they are grappling with many of the same issues that we face as a monthly meeting – dealing with reduced income, volunteers, staffing, etc.

Sessions Visioning Listening Group for Parents, March 4, 2025

[Prompt 1]

568. A mix of experiences, some with many years attending as a family and having grown up attending, for some attending once or twice, for one person never having attended.
569. Magic wand: _Wishing work schedules weren't so tricky to take extended time away
570. Wishing summer childcare/day camps weren't by the week so that there wasn't a challenge with fitting Sessions in without having to take a whole week off of work (or pay for a whole week of camp on top of Sessions fees)
571. Wishing there was an abundance of available and willing youth program volunteers. For one family present, their child would benefit from one-on-one support but there is some hesitation to ask, knowing there is such a challenge getting all the volunteers we need.
572. For one, wondering how to get kids interested in coming. The soft serve helps! For some kids the dining hall is a big draw.
573. Navigating the dining hall and the chaos there is very challenging as a single parent, especially with young children.

[Prompt 2]

574. Connection with other Friends (for youth and adults); connecting with other Quaker families
575. Being part of something beyond our local meetings
576. Joy
577. Singing
578. Deepening friendships with other Friends
579. Being part of discernment
580. Shared experiences with adults and kids
581. The youth programs. Draws the kids to return—both the program and the connections they make.
582. Being with Friends from our meeting in a different context.
583. The time in between things, for both kids and adults, the informal connections
584. The joyful traditions of youth programs: singing, finger knitting.
585. Camping was a joy for one family, even though it was very hot.
586. Appreciation for circular tables for mealtime conversations.
587. A downside: people staffing Sessions are so busy they aren't able to enjoy conversations over meals.
588. Knowing that there are more Quakers and more Quaker kids out there. Learning that he is not the only Quaker kid. Also, learning that high energy games can happen alongside Quaker worship—that there are other people who do both things.
589. Performing at coffeehouse—the confidence boost, the multigenerational support and connection. Leaving feeling like you have lots of Quaker aunties and uncles.
590. Seeing growing independence for children. Watching them feel more confident in participating more and more without parents being at their side. Knowing there are lots of caring adults around to allow for this to happen safely where it may not be possible at home.

[Prompt 3] “Challenges and possible adaptations”

591. Center the family and youth program around the weekend days and also the communal adult programs (workshops) but then during the week continue the business virtually. It's hard to carve out half weeks the way day camps work. The weekend is easy, but the days of the week are hard.
592. Is there a way to grow rather than cut? If we found a way for a lot more people to attend would it work? How could we do that?
593. One hesitation related to the “family camp” model is that it cuts off some of the opportunities for youth to participate in business. There are unique Quaker rites of passage as youth begin to participate in business such as reading epistles, sitting in on one or two business meetings, etc. Should we move towards a family focus or towards a multigenerational model, making business more engaging for youth?
594. Maybe we should have more smaller events focused on a specific thing rather than one huge event.
595. Wondering about the family camp idea. Is it time to revisit this idea? Lots of kids seem to enjoy time with parents these days. When might Friends Camp be available for that?
596. Wondering if we could try a pop-up neighborhood at a campground would work.
597. Awareness that due to age and preferences some people find camping (or even glamping) as being too rustic. Would it work to do camping or hotel option for people to decide how to approach it on their own? That does lose the everyone all together feeling.
598. With awareness that who you will see there is the biggest draw, how can we make Sessions more of an apex of other YM events? How can more YM events be more of an intentional on-ramp to Sessions? Or can we start to conceptualize other YM events as part of Sessions?
599. Awareness that this is what Quarters are trying to do but people don't attend. How do we get more people to attend Quarterly retreats and programs as families?

600. How to increase people's desire to come to Sessions? Could we drive anticipation with an exciting countdown?
601. Could we do First Day School conversations about the concept of preparation and anticipation.
602. Wondering about parents who aren't interested in coming to business meetings, even if they come to Sessions. Is there a way to expand how we approach discernment so that it is beyond business meetings? A reflection that small conversation circles like this are more connective and accessible than business meeting, especially if you are new to most of the agenda items.
603. It's very helpful to have someone personally review the agenda and what agenda items are most important for parents to participate in. Good advance materials and clear explanations and prioritizing the most important things for families to participate in.
604. Need to take parents' availability into account when setting the schedule. Wondering how to shorten the amount of time spent on reports.
605. Could an overview of the business agenda be rolled into the parents orientation?
606. Audio materials may be more accessible for parents
607. Is it possible to have an audio digest of the day and preview of the next day? Parents miss out on things because they are busy but then it's hard to stay in the loop and contribute later on.
608. Awareness that geography on campus and timing impacts parent participation. This year, excitement that business meeting will be much closer to the youth programs.
609. For those who haven't come year after year, no attachment to particular traditions or structure.

Northampton Friends Meeting, March 8, 2025

This meeting was one of two planned for Northampton Friends Meeting (the other is scheduled to take place on Sunday, March 23rd via Zoom).

[Prompt 1]]

What stood out?

- 610. Almost every option is more expensive than what we do now.
- 611. Much of the planning has been brought in-house by the staff (less volunteer committee run)
- 612. There were a lot of feelings (sadness/guilt/selfishness).
- 613. Sessions is trying to do too many things.
- 614. More sadness at where things are and gratitude that my kids were able to participate (multiple Friends)
- 615. Reading the materials reminded me that sessions is primarily focused on community and youth programs: this has meant that meeting for worship for business is less the emphasis.
- 616. Kids programs are withering in a way similar to what we've seen elsewhere (in many of our monthly meetings)
- 617. Difficulties in finding volunteers
- 618. What change? [is this what did change? Or what could change?]Eliminate most of the meeting for business for sessions: sometimes creates more damage than good, not efficient way to bring people together [sometimes alienating]. Instead that time could be used to facilitate community and learning.
- 619. Materials describing sessions provide a much clearer sense of what sessions is for [and they were very dense, as is true of advance documents for Sessions]
- 620. How to develop healthy structures (like how Permanent Board functioned for many).
- 621. We are siloed: parents or business or youth. How can we bring people together?

Magic wands:

- 622. an affordable and idyllic location where we could meet. (UMass/Amherst one space that might allow multiple different housing options.)

- 623. Take planning out of the hierarchy (to lessen burden on the staff), would allow others to have more ownerships
- 624. More worship would be valuable (as it informs our business)
- 625. [Make kids little again?]
- 626. Completely accessible/welcoming/intergenerational/playful
- 627. Bridge the gap between the youth programs and the adult programs: make things more intergenerational
- 628. Separate the business meeting from what sessions means for most people (held two or three times per year)
- 629. Joyfully create youth leadership and restore spiritual grounding. Foster a space where people with energy can be together (and not have it feel like “work”)M&C and PB structures should become a different kind of center.
- 630. Playful community-building, joint witness times.

Relationship/personal history to sessions

- 631. Been involved in sessions for long time (but not recently)
- 632. Many positive experiences as a child, went back with young kids, connected as a young professional. I took, took, took, and wanted to give back (then felt less that it was a key part of my spiritual life so there’s a little guilt)
- 633. Focused around youth programs and my kids and the role that it’s played for them. Now that they are no longer kids, relationship is much more up in the air. Much less drawn to it. (Multiple friends said this.)
- 634. “Flirted with sessions last year, but didn’t see anything for me, so never made it official”. Felt like it was geared towards people with children (too many things for too many people)
- 635. Experience was staffing youth programs (minimal engagement with business program): haven’t been back in several years.
- 636. Went last year: it was very expensive. Arrived late and left early to make it possible to afford it.
- 637. Concerns about corporate decision-making in recent years.

- 638. Have participated in many ways and roles within Yearly Meeting and Annual Sessions
- 639. Watching our children growing up into the Yearly Meeting community (taking on key roles and responsibilities; holding life transitions)
- 640. Meetings of Permanent Board were centered, gathered, and affirming.
- 641. Have too often seen YM staff suffer (how can we support them and take things off?)
- 642. Observed a big shift from volunteer and committee leadership for annual sessions to YM staff (not sustainable and not bringing in new people)
- 643. Seen young friends stepping in but not being supported.

[Prompt 2]

- 644. In 2020 or 2021, online anchor groups continued to meet at 7 in the morning on every other Sunday years later: this was a real gift. (More noted vitality of anchor groups [and the opportunity to lead anchor groups, best experience doing this jointly and resonating with that individual].)
- 645. Bread baking related to Gretchen's retirement: another real joy
- 646. Workshops (learned things I didn't know)
- 647. Extended worship has resonated deeply for me (has fostered connections with Friends from programmed meetings)
- 648. Connections with Cuba Friends and fostering opportunities with intervisitation
- 649. Early morning worship
- 650. "Fun with a purpose": creating youth programs
- 651. Intervisitation with other monthly meetings (doing work of yearly meeting youth programs)
- 652. Friends Camp is full of life
- 653. Woolman Hill's programs have become increasingly rich: is that a model for us?
- 654. Watching gifted clerks

- 655. 5 or 6 key phrases of wisdom that have stayed with me and live in me: “When you know who you are, you will know what to do” and “when a person of color tells you of their experience, believe them”
- 656. Leadership development for young friends
- 657. Living Faith: touchstone that added water to a spiritual experience (everything blooms and moments of wisdom): smaller gatherings
- 658. Monthly leadership meetings have life
- 659. Quaker Spring (Ohio YM Conservative) connections with Friends from all over the world: no plan but a structure to be together.
- 660. Nurturing Faithfulness program and groups
- 661. Personal invitation brought me back to Annual Sessions: otherwise felt disconnected
- 662. Quarterly Meeting rotating responsibilities has been an effective way to make connections and help provide spaces for many people to step forward.
- 663. Weekend retreats for Ministry and Counsel were gathered and vibrant
- 664. YM made it possible to get back to Cuba.

[Prompt 3]

- 665. Shift to weekend long but perhaps more frequent traveling to undertake organized visiting (two days, single day, welcome the extended family for a visit to be together): what lessons can we learn from other entities that have used this structure (example: some self-organizing singing communities): +1 intervisitation
- 666. Formation work: youth, intergenerational.
- 667. Retreat space for spiritual focus
- 668. Don't want to move fully to remote but some aspects of hybrid (e.g., information sharing)
- 669. First time I came to sessions I felt like I was arriving at a party that many people had been at for a long time. If I hadn't been part of the youth program, I would have left.

670. Social and community critical. Can we find ways to undertake the important connections + business in different ways? (Creates opportunities for other connections + ties us together.) [Lots of resonance to the “separate business from social”]
671. More regional gatherings (less likely to attend a shorter gathering that’s many hours away): could focus on different things (singing? Ministry and Counsel?)
672. Use of Friends Camp? Farm and Wilderness? Woolman Hill? Other locations for shorter gathering?
673. Business happens periodically through the year: container which can hold worship and business in a more punctuated but flowing way; maybe quarterly day-long business sessions?
674. Make Permanent Board more open to other people coming? Consider changing name of Permanent Board
675. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting: in spring work on business (e.g., budget) then summer was a conference to bring people together: would something like this be feasible?
676. More shared leadership; allowing friends to follow leadings: how can we lift up many more leaders than are currently lifted up in the silo-ed organizational structure.
677. Discern together what needs to happen: organically caring for each other in the moment; how can this be done at a larger scale?
678. Take burdens off staff. Materials received were from those planning vs what trying to accommodate. None of the models felt satisfying.

[Prompt 4]

679. How many people attend? If they do, how are they feeling? (Do they come back?) Can we elicit spiritually focused thinking
680. If business happens separately, how many engage? Is business getting done?
681. Want people to continue to feel “full of joy and spirit” at the end of the gathering but this feeling doesn’t have staying power through the year. What ends up lingering are the frustrations and the places where we do harm.

682. What do people report back to their monthly meetings? How does word spread?
683. What message does NEYM want to put out in the world? What work are we doing? How do people get support to follow those leadings? We're talking a lot about community and good feelings (I love all that) but why are we Quakers coming together? Young people can help us get on track (and are chomping at the bit to get us engaged). How to see when we are empowering those people and those discussions?
684. More people are volunteering to take on work that resides with staff (and be allowed to do it).
685. We're not struggling to staff youth programming
686. I would love it if we could just be organically caring for each other in the moment, getting together without need to do work
687. Bible study: trusting in god.
688. Looking for indicators feels very corporate. We will know we are there because we experience abundance if the path is still lit.
689. NFM retreat model: not the planners' job to make the retreat. It's the meeting's job.
690. Quaker Spring flows more organically with minimal planning.
691. Maybe annual sessions isn't intended to be for everyone for all time? Maybe it's how many events are there to meet the diversity of needs.
692. Holding lightly on the idea that it needs to be for all.

[Prompt 5]

693. Considerable interest in the topic of Annual Sessions: it demonstrates the life that we feel
694. Separate business from community/other
695. Intervisitation: create opportunities for people to get together in flexible ways more frequently perhaps for much shorter times
696. Staff to support leadership development (to allow bringing forward more of those willing to share their gifts and talents)

697. Yearning for intergenerationality in a new way
698. Yearning for lots of different ways to gather together (smaller and more frequent)
699. Goal: foster ways to share joy
700. Less is more: what can we let go of? Formality, structure, stress? Trust and faith in the abundance and trusting
701. Spreading out the work
702. Creating opportunities that would work for different people in different times might be more inclusive; more frequent gatherings would feed the feeling of fullness that so often dissipates over the year between Sessions.
703. Finding more ways for people to contribute. Rather than living with the question of how to get more volunteers, ask what do the people with energy and desire want to offer. Give people ownership of what's going on.
704. Some online components could complement critical in-person components.
705. Strengthening the Quarterly Meeting system might complement Annual Sessions (but some Quarters are struggling). Is there a relationship between QM struggles and YM struggling? QMs are more older people's thing; have more intergenerational things.
706. Baltimore Yearly Meeting tradition to have rotation for fun/social (strawberry shortcake at one meeting; maple snow at another)

[Prompt 6]

707. A number of us noted how formative Annual Sessions were for our kids: I worry that they might be left out of this conversation. What might that outreach look like?
708. This conversation was focused on business but it felt nurturing and joyous to be in this circle. Felt a lot of love, abundance, and unity. These discussions are alive not just in us.
709. "I literally was almost crying when reading the documents and reviewing the alternatives". Nothing sounded like what sessions has offered. I felt a great sense

of hope coming out of these meetings that might be more affirming and life-giving. Cautiously hopeful.

710. A Friend shared the feeling that happens in the spring when a seed erupts in a too tight container. The spirit bursts those containers and leads to good new life.
711. I hope that the folks receiving these notes and reflections have a listening heart that can put aside any retrenchment to listen to the message coming through.
712. Question arises in different ways for me: relationship between YM staff and contributions from volunteers. I don't have an answer but there's something in there.
713. Combining what was in Northampton Friends Meeting recently hosting Quarterly Meeting along with the ideas from Baltimore Yearly Meeting's community building activities might serve as a nudge for other ideas. Maybe a note in the NEYM newsletter?

Narramissic Valley MM & Vassalboro QM Meeting, March 9

[Prompt 1]

714. far distances involved
715. cultural changes render past Sessions unsustainable Bates College had been accessible
716. costs have doubled, services expanded: translation, child care, incorporation of new technologies

[Prompt 2]

717. both Quarterly and Yearly meetings were important when we were parents; is it still important for families with young children?
718. Quarterly is more accessible and therefore has more meaning
719. meeting for business is life-giving, especially for big questions; similarly for retreats

- 720. anticipating similarities with Quarterly and Yearly, Monthly meetings have two aspects: nurturing the internal work of attenders, and providing a springboard for external work in the world
- 721. Yearly Sessions have provided inspiration
- 722. Ministry & Counsel is important; that function still needs to be met, perhaps in new ways concern for schedule conflicts with work, affordability
- 723. decline of the middle class
- 724. good to have options to the schedule
- 725. business meetings provide opportunity to model decision making and eldering importance of meeting informally over meals
- 726. coordination needed between multiple yearly meetings so they don't have conflicting schedule the bookstore at Sessions is a source of energy
- 727. silliness of 'weighty' Friends at coffeehouse event
- 728. treasurer training through sharing
- 729. importance of treasurers and finance committees
- 730. meeting with others is restorative - that is where the energy is bringing in Friends from international locations
- 731. activism support, mentors around clerking, etc the Bible half-hours have been the essential core

[Prompt 3]

- 732. because of fewer families, more spread out; Friends Camp important: allows parents (as well as kids) to develop relationships
- 733. descriptions of past gatherings - many families, overnights or full weekends as a child, felt so nurtured and loved at gatherings
- 734. accommodations for elders with increasing infirmities college campus prices getting out of reach intergenerational gatherings are important for all ages
- 735. hybrid meetings: caution needed, must recognize limitations of Zoom; what is lost? what is gained? clerking hybrid meetings is a challenge
- 736. an all-zoom Yearly meeting would not inspire attendance

[Prompt 6]

6. Closing go-around: Share what is on your heart and mind coming away from this conversation. This could include acknowledging a feeling, a new insight, a hope, or a prayer.

- 737. need to see people in person
- 738. complex, need fluidness wherever it lands
- 739. gratitude for being able to 'think out loud' with others

Immediate afterthoughts

- 740. legality and integrity of changes to NEYM Sessions; to be true to ourselves.
- 741. What happens if Yearly Meeting is not held?
- 742. representative system could be used email Janet with any after thoughts

North Shore Friends Meeting, March 14, 2025

[Prompt 1]

- 743. Although I never attended Yearly Meeting sessions, I very much enjoyed the annual retreats that our meeting held. There were times for getting to know each other, spending time in meal preparation and recreation. Families came and we had either a guest speaker or a topic we shared in worship. In considering the background materials, I feel that the 6-day sessions are too long and need to be shortened.
- 744. I have had the experience of attending the Baltimore Yearly Meeting. The timing of NEYM Sessions in August makes it difficult for me to leave my home in the summertime. - I was impressed by the length of time that NEYM Sessions has been happening. There appeared to be time for Bible study and square dancing! It is not appealing to me that people are housed in dorm rooms. I have enjoyed smaller gatherings of Friends where I have gotten to know people. We need to find ways to encourage and welcome more attendance by young people. The cost seems too high to stay far away in a college setting while attending Sessions.

745. I frequently attended Yearly Meeting with my mother as a young person and sometimes with a friend. I enjoyed meeting other young Friends from other New England states. Yearly Meeting used to start earlier in the summer, right after school ended. When the Yearly Meeting changed to happen in August it made it more difficult for me and my family to attend.
746. When I attended the Yearly Meeting I could only come on the weekend as I was still working. My husband attended the full session. I enjoyed the Business Meeting where there seemed to be lively discussions of a hot topic. It was exciting to be a part of this experience. In the summer we have a commitment to spending time in Maine together so the timing of Sessions is difficult.
747. For a twenty year period I was very involved in Yearly Meeting Sessions. Once I was working full-time I found it more difficult to be involved. Now that I am retired I have more time to devote to Yearly Meeting. COVID has had a large impact. The business of Yearly Meeting has taken over much of the time with less worshipping gatherings. Seeing and meeting new people occurs during the dining time.

[Prompt 2]

748. The weekly Yearly Meeting calls with breakout sessions after the initial presentation and discussions are worthwhile. Brian Drayton's sessions are worthwhile.
749. Monthly calls help make connections to Friends from other meetings. - Adult education with challenging topics or readings stimulates thoughtful discussion. - Sharing with Friends meetings over the region during the year.

[Prompt 3]

750. Break up the Sessions to have part of the week on Zoom only and hold the in-person gatherings over 2 days/nights.
751. Hold a Session over a long weekend in the Fall, Friday to Monday. Continue with the Bible half-hour time. Have satellite interest groups gather over the year.

- 752. Hold Sessions closer to home so that there is an opportunity to return to home as needed.
- 753. Find a way to reduce costs.
- 754. Have smaller regional meetings during the year so more people would be likely to attend.
- 755. Have a more worshipful business meeting experience.
- 756. Have a more light-filled large gathering space with windows.
- 757. Hold Sessions at a smaller, more intimate setting.
- 758. Have committee reports given on-line along with the larger gatherings.

[Prompt 4]

- 759. Outreach happens through smaller gatherings/workshops/calls covering specific topics that stimulate interest and attendance.
- 760. The fact that the Yearly Meeting is opening up avenues for sharing new ideas or approaches to address and revitalize the Yearly Meeting Sessions.

[Prompt 5]

- 761. Sessions give the opportunity to share our Quaker connections in the world to meet the moment.
- 762. We have core values that are shared and expressed as we gather in large or smaller groups.
- 763. We have ways of sharing hope and spiritual guidance.
- 764. We still want to be in unity with larger groups of Quakers through gatherings, workshops and intervisitation.
- 765. Tension occurs when considering how much time is devoted to Yearly Meeting Sessions and the location/cost of the Sessions.

[Prompt 6]

- 766. People expressed positive feelings about the process of developing new approaches to Yearly Meeting Sessions.

767. People shared their experience of Yearly Meeting, regional and local meetings and the positive interactions with Friends from other meetings in New England.
768. We were reminded of our past positive experiences with retreats, calls, workshops and gatherings that enhance our Quaker experience.

Mt Toby Friends Meeting, March 16

[Prompt 1]

769. Among us, some are regular attenders, some less frequently. One Friend first attended over 40 years ago, others have started attending just within the last decade or so.
770. Some attended more frequently when their children (now grown) were involved in youth programs.
771. Most expressed value from attendance; in the connection with other Friends, in the participation in corporate discernment and in the interactions their children had in youth programs.
772. Some had the experience of being overwhelmed by the size and intensity of Sessions.

[Prompt 2]

773. Several spoke of the importance of the meeting for business to them.
774. Many of us found the possibility of social interaction with Friends very important and noted that much of this occurred at meals.
775. In-person connection (in contrast to virtual) is very important for learning about each other and sharing our spiritual lives.
776. Some noted that in-person is also important for good discernment during YM meeting for business.
777. Bible Half-hour and plenary speaker is of value to some.

[Prompt 3]

778. There was not a strong feeling that on-campus housing was needed, although attendees being in charge of their own housing would have some challenges.
779. Common meals would continue to be very important especially if folks are not staying on campus.
780. Youth programs at Sessions were also noted as important.
781. How long does Sessions have to be? There was general agreement that shorter (for example, a long weekend) would be adequate for the social and spiritual connections that provide the cross-fertilization that we so value.
782. Several Friends noted that they have attained this same sense of community at the day-long events run by YM in recent years.
783. We discussed the often wide-ranging agenda for M4B and wondered if our business meetings at Sessions could be shortened by careful discernment of what is ready for the agenda. Also, there may be items that are not suitable for the YM to consider at all.

Amesbury Meeting, March 23, 2025

[Prompt 1]

784. A small number of Amesbury Friends attended (6); one goes to Sessions every year, 4 have gone previously, but not recently and 1 (very new to Friends) has never gone.
785. All are over 65.
786. Reasons for not going included the time commitment (especially weekdays), finances, and disenchantment. (The nature of this disenchantment will be addressed below.)
787. Those who have attended in the past had fond memories of attending with their young and teenaged children. Others cited the reunion aspect of yearly sessions for them and for their children—seeing old friends, etc. One felt that it was important to attend to deal with business/discernment. Another felt put off by the Committee on Right Relationship (Noticing Patterns?) as a barrier to free speech and discernment.

788. In the course of this discussion the “need to preserve an in-person gathering for families and kids” rose as a paramount concern.

[Prompt 2] We understood this query as a question about gatherings between annual sessions.

789. Few have participated in these and most were not fully aware of what’s been offered.

790. One person who had attended a day event in Maine found it fun and worthwhile.

791. Another cited the “leadership” Zoom meeting as helpful and informative.

792. There was also a concern expressed that our quarterly meeting is not functioning and that resurrecting it would contribute to community and spiritual nurture.

[Prompt 3]

793. Schedule Annual Sessions over a shorter 3-day weekend (Friday through Sunday) as a way of better accommodating working families.

794. Have a strong youth and family component.

795. Schedule Sessions every other year.

796. We recognized in our group that there is a tension between discernment/meeting for business and more spiritual pursuits. Some felt that meeting for business was the primary reason to have annual sessions, while others felt that there is too much emphasis on meeting for business and not enough time spent in providing opportunities for meeting for worship, spiritual nurturance, fellowship, building community, etc.

797. Some thought that maybe more decision making could be accomplished by Permanent Board with only very critical issues being brought to Annual Sessions. Permanent Board, itself, might be revised to include more representation of each monthly meeting.

798. It was agreed that a college campus with dormitory and meal accommodations is still the right venue for Sessions.

[Prompt 4]

- 799. Increased attendance overall, but especially for young Friends and families with young children and teens.
- 800. Reduce the financial deficit, part of which might be accomplished by reducing the number of days.
- 801. Fewer items coming back to Permanent Board for further discernment.

[Prompt 4(b)] This seemed like a separate query from indicators.

- 802. Hold onto in-person Sessions.
- 803. Keep and enhance youth and family programming
- 804. Keep the Bible half hour and the daily early morning unprogrammed worship
- 805. Provide more opportunities for deep unprogrammed worship
- 806. Reduce or eliminate workshops and focus sessions

[Prompt 5]

- 807. We all recognized the importance of Annual Sessions for nurturing spirit and building community, especially for young Friends, families and children.
- 808. We recognized the tension between a focus on conducting business and a focus on spiritual nurture. However, we're not clear on how to navigate an appropriate balance between the two.
- 809. We recognized the need for changes that would make Sessions more attractive to more Friends and to do so within financial restrictions.
- 810. We were grateful to have the opportunity to provide input to the discernment process as it unfolds.

[Prompt 6]

- 811. Some participants indicated a renewed interest in attending sessions this year as a result of this reflection.

812. Hope was expressed that Quakers in New England will prosper—that Monthly Meetings will get stronger and larger which in turn will lead to stronger Quarterly Meetings and the Yearly Meeting.
813. One wondered if there are ways we, as Quakers, can more fully touch the non-Quaker world with our testimonies and culture. This could lead to a stronger larger Quaker community

Beacon Hill, [date]

[Prompt 1]

814. Increased inclusivity for Cubans, young adults, youth, people with limited vacation schedules and finances.
815. Make events free for children.
816. Longing for increased participation overall.
817. Opportunities for kids to witness adults in discernment.
818. How we thrive in spirit? How to get back in a room together more often?
819. Document showed that sessions structure changed over time, so she could embrace new ideas now more easily.
820. Home groups are important for developing an understanding about business meetings among newer attenders and for forging connection with members holding differing views.
821. The document suggests opportunity costs. Please specify!
822. Another proposed a church camp model for sessions in addition to more intimate local gatherings.
823. Several attendees shared a desire for youth involvement and accessibility, highlighting the importance of integrating younger members into decision-making.
824. Recognize all the time spent on computer issues as worship.

[Prompt 2]

825. Extended worship gatherings have deepened centering.
826. Bible half-hour and plenary provide common learning across the whole community.
827. Community-building has been enhanced by smaller, regional meetings because the smaller setting is more comfortable for some to connect with others and because it is easier for more people who can't get time off of work to attend.

- 828. Regional gatherings that lack corporate discernment tend not to be as deep.
- 829. Vital for children to be able to interact with each other. Regional gatherings bring more kids together, but the 'village of children and adults' at annual sessions is unique.
- 830. Eating together seems key. Having time together to form consensus on difficult topics is necessary.
- 831. Playing capture the flag together is vital!

[Prompt 3]

- 832. The conversation focused on balancing online meetings with in-person community.
- 833. Participants discussed the merits of hybrid models where presentations to business meeting are conducted online for 2 days then move to residential gatherings for detailed, face-to-face discernment for 2 to 3 days.
- 834. Zoom lacks the opportunity for physical movement found with in-person interactions.
- 835. One participant pointed out how playing capture the flag at sessions seemed like a particularly effective way to align disparate opinions.
- 836. Eating together was mentioned several times as well and implies physical motion.
- 837. Being part of a decision-making process is exciting and important, but how do we maintain the 'heap of coals' technology of our tradition when we move on-line out of expediency?
- 838. The value of being together should not be minimized.
- 839. If part of the annual sessions business meetings were held on-line, it would be beneficial to encourage people to bunch-up locally to try to maximize the non-verbal communication between participants as much as possible to aid discernment.

[Prompt 4]

- 840. One attender expressed a desire for the community to reflect on its core mission and values while critically examining patterns of oppression. He emphasized the importance of support and eldering among members.
- 841. One person highlighted indicators of progress, such as increased diversity in participation and financial support linked to the community's activism related to religious freedom

842. A participant proposed letting go of the roll call and perhaps some pomp at the closing.
843. The depth in which people become part of things would be a positive indicator.
844. One discussed the historical context of Quaker involvement in boarding schools for Indigenous people, illustrating the complexity of reconciliation and the importance of collective decision-making that might only be possible in multi-day, in-person settings.
845. One emphasized the need for deeper community connections to foster a sense of belonging, while another suggested exploring long-term solutions for establishing a central meeting space to enhance fellowship and continuity.

[Prompt 6]

846. New insights coming from learning that MA state government also brings people together to discern things. Quakers are not so odd after all.
847. Inspired with everything I've heard about regional gatherings and am left wondering if we could leverage Quarterly Meeting as a place with a good possibility for community building.
848. I hope Friends continue to connect and not feel a sense of isolation even though our worship practice involves a lot of solitude.
849. Inspired about regional gatherings and energy.
850. Buoyed by what I've heard. So good to hear. Feel more connected because of our meeting today.

Hanover Monthly Meeting, March 23, 2025

[Prompt 1(b)]

851. Attended Sessions (YM) twice at Castleton VT, and once in Maine.
852. It was wonderful to be among so many Friends and to see so many children running around.
853. Due to the duration and relaxed nature, deep conversations and interactions were made possible.
854. Perhaps it could meet every other year rather than annually, and the work could get done in a different way in the interim.
855. Some have not been able to attend, due to lifestyle choices (farming), but their hearts have been with the gathering at Sessions.

856. Some have gone for a shorter time (3 days) and been greatly surprised how wonderful, one heart immersion to the next. Could have enjoyed even more time. Seeing the interactions among the children was really nice. At the same time, the cost was prohibitive for this Friend.
857. One Friend has found value in working with committees through the YM. The community feeling was created by living together, eating together, working together, and socializing together. This community aspect is wonderful.
858. A Friend spoke to attending Sessions years ago when their children were young, and then not being able to go for a long time. With Castleton, VT location, it has been more convenient to attend. The value of Sessions comes from the relationships that can happen that provide the “glue” for the Religious Society of Friends.
859. Many of our members have participated in YM activities, served on committees. It is important to share with meetings WHY attendance at Sessions can be so meaningful. The offerings, spiritual, educational, are wide and cannot be easily summarized.
860. The relationship with Cuban Quakers has been facilitated and nurtured through the YM, which has been of tremendous influence and importance to HFM.
861. Participating on various anchor groups and on committees with shared concerns and getting to know and work with other NE Quakers has been of tremendous benefit in living into the Spirit.
862. It is profound to meet with 600 other Friends in Sessions, uplifting and rewarding.
863. Shortening the program may come with unintended consequences. Perhaps children could have a longer time and then adults join for a shorter program.
864. One Friend found that her children learned songs and reflected much Spirit after a full week of Sessions. She found the program to be so nicely integrated, inspirational, especially the Bible Half Hour sessions and the sense of how Spirit is moving the larger body of Quakers.
865. Gaining a sense of the wider context and making connections with other Friends was rewarding. It was expensive, however.

[Prompts 2-4]

866. This is the 5th year of COVID, and what is important about gathering at Sessions is gathering at Sessions.
867. One Friend’s children brought them to Sessions as teens, and it was a rite of initiation reflecting who they were becoming.

868. The value of discernment as a large group around big issues impressed her deeply, and reflects back into how we conduct ourselves in MfWfB. Discernment is the power of YM at its core, both individually and corporately.
869. The friends and sense of community made by young people at Sessions has lasted a lifetime and aided them in how to conduct business and live their lives.
870. One Friend rose to say that his parents had met at Sessions, which matters greatly to him!
871. Attending the Towards Right Relationship presentation through YM deeply impressed a Friend but was possible to attend virtually. She can understand why things may need to change.
872. One Friend felt so held, nurtured and loved when she had a deep spiritual opening occur at Sessions, speaking to the power of corporate worship.
873. Why are we not willing to spend the money or the time on attending YM? We should ask ourselves this question.
874. The MfWfB at Sessions, the clerking of the meeting, and the sense that we are all responsible for the life of the YM.
875. Gifts to the Meeting: workshops at sessions, sharing of various ministries, Puente, Right Sharing of Resources, and other efforts.
876. Enlivens our Meeting by being a resource and an inspiration.

[Prompt 3]

877. A Friend rose to speak to the finances of YM, which had been mentioned earlier. YM is “pay as led” and finances should not be a barrier. Actually moving to “pay as led” has been more remunerative than a standard fee basis.
878. In HFM, the work of our committees was highlighted in the SoS report. Analogous to this, the work of the YM rests on its committees. Perhaps having a YM representative from each committee to its committee at YM would be of benefit. This would be a way of increasing the ties and communication between the MM and YM. The committee groups might meet, via Zoom or in-person, two or three times during the year, to build on their ideas generated at Sessions, strengthen relationships, and bring back to their local meetings possible enhancements, all the while reinforcing local meetings’ connections with NEYM.
879. The magic of YM is the annual sessions with its life of a week of being together, gathered, and having fun together.
880. As a MM, looking at the schedule of Sessions ahead of time, reviewing it together and making a plan as to how we might share our gifts or represent our MM while there (and bringing things back to MM) might encourage us to attend Sessions, which can be a bit daunting.

881. How to reconfigure Sessions to help Friends succeed? A Friend recalled when YM decided on the need for a vigorous young Friends program, and how this became so important that other YMs looked to NEYM as a model for how to include children. She spoke to keeping the children's programs a priority as we move forward.
882. A Friend spoke to learning how important it is to attend MfWfB for the MM. Similarly, attending YM can strengthen your connection to Quakerism. Sessions is a significant time commitment, and perhaps Friends might be able to attend more regularly if the meeting was shortened or made less frequent?
883. How would it be if Sessions were structured to have a few core days but still be offered for a longer time for those able to attend?
884. Being given a role might help. Another sharing "If I have a job, the commitment to going is stronger", and "If there is a peer group available, that might also help"
885. YM could organize a new structure to reflect the needs and then meet in person.
886. One Friend opined that a shorter meeting rather than an every other year meeting appeals more than every other year, to facilitate relationships. Perhaps doing more of the meeting business in advance and still meeting to attend to priority business as a corporate body.
887. A lot is at stake here. Technology has become a barrier in some ways. Technology may not be the best answer to our hunger to gather. There is a presence and an absence that occurs with virtual attendance, and being together in larger groups for powerful discernment (not only "business") may allow us to address bigger questions as a group. Our history as Quakers draws us to hold these "big" questions. What is precious and what is peripheral? How do we want to evolve our practice? We long to be together in person. We yearn to do something together and experience something important.
888. Concern that if we meet every other year, what happens to youth, to the relationships we have with each other?
889. What are the big cost things, how could we organize to reduce the cost, having jobs to do, which seems to be a desire of some, that could lower the barrier for the YM.
890. Keeping it annual, shortening the time, but let the MM know ahead of time what will be on the agenda, increased involvement.
891. Perhaps YM could plan farther ahead to let MM know what will be offered. Engaging with Quarterly Meeting is another related question.
892. We are all connected, we need more conversations about what the YM is doing.
893. Perhaps having experiences of Friends published would serve to promote and motivate

894. Shorter meeting time, keep it annual, get all sorts of Meeting folks to go—discuss as a Meeting.

What should we emphasize moving forward?

895. Youth seeing adults and being mentored by them, having all generations together is actually key.
896. Being proactive is itself being on the right path.
897. Sense of community, of being together, needs to be continued.
898. Can we hold a question or issue in our MM during the year that would then be addressed at Sessions? Would this empower us to engage?
899. A sense of accompaniment, a peer group, perhaps MM could be meeting ahead of time to foster this and attend as not just individuals. This sentiment resonated with a Friend, who asked “how can we hold one another, ensure that the process of attending YM strengthens the MM?” Having intentionality about attending YM might serve to enliven us and help to reignite the Spirit among us (and among the wider Quaker community). Also, the Cuban Quakers have expressed the importance of having a relationship with YM, how much influence it had, serving as a beacon for others around the world.
900. Job to do, committees to participate in, the wider world and ministries, political awareness. Should we offer some of our strengths to YM, take on more of the responsibility?
901. We can participate by way of being on a YM committee. And having YM representatives from our MM report to the MM about their activities. However, are we asked to do too many things to be faithful members of the Society? (a committee in MM, a committee in Quarterly, and a committee at YM would be about the limit, but we are often needed to be on more than one committee in the MM for it to function). On the other hand, the YM has been very supportive of the Religious Education program, something that the MM may not do as well alone.
902. Perhaps when it is time to sign up for YM Sessions we could have reports on those who have attended and those serving on YM committees as a way of encouraging people to attend. We always have a report back to the Meeting after Sessions, but we need to have more frequent updates about YM to encourage engagement and participation at that level.

Portland Friends Meeting, March 21, 2025

[Prompt 1]

903. that adjusted for inflation, cost of sessions is more than 3X what it used to be.

904. No one present liked any of the options that were presented, none of them invite or reconsider how we invite attendance to our gathering.
905. There aren't active efforts to recruit individuals to go to sessions. Noticed no enthusiasm or vision. The vision contained in the documents is small, and thus therein't a clear reasoning about why we should be gathering in wider fellowship beyond Monthly Meetings.
906. We let the church-hurt around evangelism and doctrinalism get in the way of being vocal in our meetings.
907. The broader trend of distrust towards institutions was noted.
908. The more business we have to do the more important it is to take MORE time to pray —and time and time again, Business seems more important than the faith.
909. This group has a collective attendance at sessions at over 132 NEYM annual sessions. And collectively has attended the annual sessions of more than 12 different yearly meetings outside of Kenya. Has attended FGC, FUM triennials, FWCC World Gatherings, Young Friends of North America.

[Prompt 2]

910. All that matters is times when we've experienced God in our presence; this has happened more in business sessions than at meals, and only sometimes at the contradance. Spiritual formation is experiential, and so the most important thing we do is create time when we experience the presence of God.
911. This model had life for the Boomer generation but they failed to be open and bring in the next cohorts to follow them. There is a positive spiral effect, similar to the experiential learning model, that comes from having big group experiences, followed by small groups to process, followed by individual reflection time and then repeating and reiterating that experience and reflection process with the same people day after day after day.
912. We have abandoned our faith that worship brings us into close communion to God in each other, judging by the fact that we hardly have any worship at annual sessions (business meeting does not count).
913. What has life is holding the contradictions and seeking the deeper unity with the spaciousness and time that is required, which we continually fail to do. There is a pattern that those who believe we will hear something to guide us, simply wait, and those who aren't doing that take up lots of space quickly in the discernment process and good discernment is disrupted; we are undisciplined.
914. What has life is the experience that convinces us (and others!) that we will ultimately be guided and the faith/belief that we CAN have that experience, this seems to be missing from assumptions built into how sessions is constructed. We need a radical move towards a belief that worship could work and the support

and accountability to make it happen, starting from the ground up in local meetings.

915. It's become clear that as Young Friends has shrunk, those who remain take Quakerism seriously and want to be involved in what everyone else is doing, so completely separate programming no longer makes sense.

[Prompt 3]

916. We need to be looking at other institutions who could hold us rather than colleges and universities. We were in unity that if we keep the costs this high we are actively choosing older people over younger people who might attend. The following adaptations arose:
- a. We are in unity that the work of governance of the non-profit organization of NEYM must be delegated to the Permanent board, and that the Annual Sessions must be turned over to the discernment that the body needs to do that isn't about running an NGO.
 - b. We are in unity that a residential gathering longer than one weekend is essential to the spiritual and corporate formation and discernment that the body of Friends in New England needs.
 - c. We are in unity that Annual Sessions should shift to an All Volunteer and Mutual Aid model (with a question about staffing if it is going to be also designed for children). We should be serving one another, cooking and cleaning etc, to build fellowship and a sense of service and community rather than paying to be served.
 - d. We are in unity that the focus of the gathering should be worship, including instruction about worship. Melding faith formation with worship would make sessions more accessible for children *and* newcomers.
 - e. We are in unity about what the daily schedule of the Annual Sessions should be: Breakfast, Morning Semi-Programmed worship (including spiritual instruction within worship), Lunch, Siesta, Afternoon Business Meeting Session, Dinner, Evening Semi-Programmed Worship. And THAT IS ALL for each day of the gathering.
 - f. The result of both of these simplifications is that running the annual sessions should not be the staff's job, and will no longer need to be. Sessions should be organized by volunteers again and the staff should be focused elsewhere on YM business.
 - g. We had two specific visions of ways this could play out, one in a more rural setting and one in a more urban setting
 - i. Meet at a Summer Camp: ditch all tech except for interpretation and make it much much cheaper. Volunteer and Mutual Aid model of building fellowship through cooking and cleaning for each other, simply and in volume. Follow the above schedule.

- ii. Meet in New Bedford: assist in rebuilding the New Bedford Meetinghouse to accommodate the originally intended 500 people. Housing would be on your own (get an Air COnditioned hotel room if you need it, share an AirBNB with families, be hosted by area Friends, rent a house for everyone from your Meeting), YFs and YAFs could all sleep on the floor at the UU's and other churches. Sleeping on the floor could be offered as an option for adults too! Breakfast on your own, and 2 big shared meals per day would be cooked using the mutual aid and volunteer service model. Follow the above schedule for the program. This option is public transit accessible, grounded in the historical space Friends inhabited, and brings us to a diverse city that looks more like the diversity we aspire to in the RSoF.

[Prompt 4]

- 917. The most important indicator is that there is a palpable sense that God is with us, and that we are able to hold the contradictions among us and give enough space for the emergence of the deeper unity beneath the apparent contradictions.
- 918. That Preaching, Teaching and Exhortation becomes the work of how we build up the religious life among us. We see that form is following function, rather than trying to cater to the privileged needs of individuals. Younger up and coming ministers are freed to step into ministry instead of being sequestered in running the youth programs. If we let the purpose be the bouncer: if we let general worship with preaching, teaching and singing be the center and ditch the contradance, coffee house, plenaries, committee meetings, worships, anchor groups, all ages worship etc., we identify what are the spiritual reasons that we would have the youth be present. We would be excited and much more willing to invite new people to annual sessions, if the experience convinces us that we will ultimately be guided, and that the Sessions has a baseline faith and belief that we CAN have that experience and be guided.

[Prompt 5] We reached explicitly unity on the following points. If we had more time, likely we would have had others.

- 919. That continuing a residential gathering longer than a weekend is essential to the spiritual life of the body of Friends in New England.
- 920. That the agenda for discernment of the gathering of friends in New England is NOT the running of the organization / NGO of the YM. We should delegate the running of the organization to PB. There is an agenda for discernment, but it's not the running of the non-profit.

921. Move to a Mutual Aid and volunteer model of serving one another (being conscious of the concern if we're designing it for kids)
922. That the daily schedule of annual Sessions should be limited to: Breakfast, Morning Semi-Programmed worship (including spiritual instruction within worship), Lunch, Siesta, Afternoon Business Meeting Session, Dinner, Evening Semi-Programmed Worship
923. That if we keep the costs this high we are actively choosing older people over younger people who might attend, we should seek alternative venues that are not college and university campuses that are much cheaper
924. There must be a lot more worship, and more instruction about worship. Including semi-programmed worship that melds faith formation with worship, which would inherently be more accessible for children and newcomers.
925. We must create enough space in worship and discernment to hold the contradictions and seek the underlying deeper unity between us, and allow God to act to bring us together.
926. Evangelism: a revised Annual Sessions along these lines would create a critical pathway to bringing new Quakers into our Monthly Meeting, by having something for people who are new and hungering for the Way "Come! Come! You should go to NEYM Annual Sessions"

Sandwich Monthly Meeting, March 29, 2025

[Prompt 1]

927. Information was helpful
 928. We're not the only YM having struggles
 929. Financial cost to individuals & the organization
 930. Extraordinary burden on staff
 931. COVID opened up opportunities
- "Magic Wand":
932. Lower the cost
 933. Travel distance = zero
 934. Abundant intergenerational sharing of gifts
 935. Imbue zoom with the sense of being in-person
 936. Disentangle business from (the rest of) Sessions
 937. Become deeply ready for the experience of Sessions before we get there
 938. I wish the thematic character of Sessions was more prominent; worship around the theme helps us become more focused.
 939. Return to the olden days when Friends seemed to have more time, less clutter, in their lives.

Personal History:

- 940. Being part of Sessions as parent, and later as staff working with kids. Staff felt like family to me.
- 941. Bible half hour was meaningful, which was a surprise.
- 942. Friends held me in prayer when I was very upset. It was powerfully comforting & supportive.
- 943. When I attended with my young children, I welcomed the sense of the whole Meeting helping to care for the children; I had other parents to connect with.
- 944. I enjoyed hearing committee reports and learning what was happening around the YM.
- 945. On Zoom the Bible half hour was very important, but the large group experience was less so.
- 946. I cherished living and breathing next to people, sitting next to someone I didn't know, making connections.
- 947. I am new to Quakers, and dropped into Sessions via Zoom—not the best way! I joined an 8 AM small group session and found how astonishingly able it can be to get a small group together and connected.
- 948. Attending full time in person was exhausting. Too much happening. I needed time to chill!

[Prompt 3]

Note: Surprisingly few people at our visioning session had taken advantage of regional, mid-year gatherings, or even knew about them. Most comments focused on Quarterly Meeting gatherings, which were better known.

- 949. Outside of Sessions, QM is my only regional experience. I am not aware of other NEYM opportunities. I'm interested in learning more about them.
- 950. At QM it was interesting to see a diversity of Friends come together and speak the same language. Offering new ideas, new learning, and commitment to change. Being welcomed, not as a stranger, by people you don't even know. People were interested in what is happening in your own meeting. Opportunities to awaken and enliven your life.
- 951. Regional meetings can offer a better balance between business, work, and social time. Hospitality, education, sitting in silence is important.
- 952. Life of the nation beyond the venue always creeps in. For example, after 911 Friends were struggling how to cope with war that was based on a lie. It seeped in everywhere. How to cope? What is our communal purpose?

953. Love seeing children in community. Love the community of youth-workers (especially at Sessions). When I was on a committee, Committee Days were great. Love getting together with Quakers
954. Being a Friend is getting to know who you are as a Quaker. Opportunity can be right where you are, but the Society offers other opportunities. Helps to know yourself as a human being. YM structure helps. Get to know yourself in different venues.
955. Mid-year, day-long gatherings were very frustrating for me because there was too much discussion. Where's the worship? A few minutes of quiet worship is not enough.
956. Seeds from YM Sessions need to go out and establish roots. (implication that seeds can be planted in regional gatherings)

[Prompt 3]

957. Regional, themed meetings.
958. Representative YM for business; people who are interested already know what business is.
959. The "Virtual Call" program happened out of turmoil in the Yearly Meeting. For our meeting it engendered a Small Group that continues to meet, all because of the call that someone had.
960. Create more opportunity for families to do things together.
961. When meeting for business is conducted in good order and grounded in spirit, the experience of discernment and reaching unity in a huge meeting for business is (WOW) valuable.
962. A weekend retreat would work for my life style.

[Prompt 4]

963. Take a measure of "gifts of the spirit" that are evident in meetings under the care of YM
964. We are on the right path if members stop referring to YM as "they" when talking about decisions that YM has made, and instead start talking about it as "we". Even if they're saying "I think it was a mistake when we decided that." Meetings would be taking ownership of the fact that we are yearly meeting. The fact that people [during our visioning process] kept saying "they" got rid of the committees, or "they" decided to do this or that, when it was a YM decision and often happened during Sessions, is an indication to me that we are on the wrong path.
965. The process of holding a small Sessions-Visioning meeting today is an example of being on the right path.

- 966. Finding grace in regeneration
- 967. When kids are drawn to Quakerism
- 968. On the right path when there is movement, from vision to speaking/acting truth.
- 969. On the right path when there is acknowledgement of the conflict between rapid response [by a representative body] and the larger body. The rapid response thing, where NEYM writes a response to things in the world, is an illness. It begins to feel less like the organization will speak for you.

[Prompt 5]

Unity:

- 970. Wholesome purpose of our gathering today.
- 971. Supportive of a new vision for Sessions.
- 972. Bible Half Hour is important; many of us are unfamiliar with scripture.
- 973. Intergenerational must be kept strong. Youth will be here when we are gone.
- 974. Disentangle business from the social/learning/worship nature of a gathering.
- 975. Unity in wanting to know how to live a Quaker life. “Being” Quaker vs being “a Quaker.”
- 976. We have something to add that is very important. What the world needs. Model within ourselves, but also need to reach out.
- 977. The need to feel part of something bigger than our meetings.

Tension:

- 978. There were negative comments from a couple of Friends, not reflected by the larger group: NEYM is too top heavy.
- 979. Governance gets in the way of what Friends desire.

Wrestling:

- 980. The Why seems to be solid—people go to gatherings searching for sense of community. But the How and What are questions we’re still wrestling with.

[Prompt 6]

- 981. Grateful for today’s opportunity to share and hear from everyone else. Interested in hearing what other groups have to say, and especially what younger people see as the vision.
- 982. I have faith that something will work.
- 983. Governance of any large group involves politics. Any large group has small groups, insider groups. Quakers have managed to do an above average job to lead peacefully and democratically, even though they do get into disputes.

984. Glad that NEYM has asked us to convene and give input. Obviously, Sessions is not working well. We all have different ideas. I'm encouraged that we all have ideas! Look forward to what NEYM does with our suggestions and those of other visioning groups.
985. Visioning can create a spark and deepen & enliven our experience as Quakers.
986. I feel we have done a good job today of being "in spirit."
987. I am happy that we all cared enough to be here today. I like being among people who care about what I care about.

Dover Quarter at Concord Meeting, March 30, 2025

Despite valiant effort by our facilitator, Friends resisted being corralled into answering one question at a time, but all had a chance to speak and seemed to have a chance to bring up what was on their minds and hearts.

988. Those who had attended sessions brought up just about every offering at our annual gathering as something someone would miss greatly: early morning worship, early morning coffee, bible half hour, large group worship, time for business as a large body, workshops, coffee house
989. It was spoken that we long to keep what has been, others reminding us that the 80s and 90s growth is fairly recent and it can and has been done differently.
990. Some who were not loyal attenders said that they were unlikely to take scarce vacation time to attend
991. One said the business meeting was not inviting to a first time attender.
992. We laughed wryly when it was mentioned that in coming years we may all meet in jail, which would solve our housing cost problem, thus acknowledging, I believe, that external events may overtake our limited planning.
993. Two points of consensus were that we want all ages together at at least some gatherings. We want gatherings large enough to have many children, and adults want a gathering larger than our Quarters bring together in recent years. All ages want the unprogrammed time which allows chance encounters and conversations.
994. We need the opportunity for continuity and ways to pass on institutional knowledge.
995. We did not favor holding gatherings less than yearly.
996. Many spoke positively of a long weekend event.
997. There was no positive mention of an all zoom event as a solution, though it was brought up that zoom can be acceptable for workshops and some kinds of business.
998. We could not imagine linking regional gatherings effectively with technology.
999. Intervisitation was mentioned twice, a valuable way to connect us.

1000. One Friend urged us to make time for a “searching examination of our spiritual condition, challenging ourselves at the foundation”.
1001. Some creative ideas were to have two smaller Quarterly Meetings hold gatherings in common.
1002. There was support for having regional or traditional Quarters expand programming and meet for two or three days, thus taking on some of the role that YM sessions have had. As Quarters become more fun and more children attend, some hoped for a greater attendance and vitality.
1003. Eventually then, having more Yearly Meeting functions carried on by emissaries from the Quarters would not feel to be such a loss.
1004. In Cuba, we heard, there are many children and young people in the Monthly Meetings, so not having the resources for them and numerous adults to go to Yearly Meeting is less of a concern.
1005. We wondered whether Friends Camp could again host multi-generational gatherings or could our Yearly Meeting even buy another camp with central building(s) large enough for meetings and housing for those for whom camping or cabins are not an option. (Methodists have camps for sale, we think.)
1006. I felt unity when two Friends expressed that although we had not found our solution, we felt confidence that we will find a way forward which will be right for us and it will include all ages and time to be together in many ways.

Wellesley Friends Meeting, March 16, 2025

[Prompt 1 & 2]

1007. It could be overwhelming in moments, with so many people in attendance, and solitary time hard to find.
1008. Attendance requires the use of vacation time for those working outside the home. This is a significant barrier for some juggling the demands of extended family and work obligations.
1009. The conflict over the FUM personnel policy has had a lasting impact. Members felt estranged and embattled by the open hostility expressed during sessions. This wound has yet to heal fully. The way conflict was managed may not have been the finest pattern or example for the monthly meetings.
1010. A noticeable shift in leadership toward Christ-centered leanings among the leadership can be disconcerting for more universalist Friends, who feel less welcome than in the past.
1011. The experience could also be quite rich. Meeting a broad range of Friends, with a broad range of perspectives, is engaging.

1012. The small groups, Bible half-hours, the workshops all deepen our spiritual lives. “Someone will say something true in words we never would have found for ourselves.”
1013. Lasting friendships have formed during the weeklong sessions.
1014. You want to be around those whose lives speak to you.
1015. Meeting for Business can provide an important understanding of Quaker process and the questions facing our Society. One member recalled a pivotal moment during business meeting that moved her and stays with her. Another member favorably noted an early effort to address at sessions the controversy over Palestine.
1016. The strong sense of community amongst YAFs is apparent and encouraging.

[Prompt 3]

1017. The importance of small groups was reinforced. Members shared how they had been supported during difficult times by their small groups. The arrangement promotes an intimacy among members of different meetings.
1018. Being separate from our daily lives, living together, eating together, focused fully on the opportunities presented, are critical elements of the Yearly meeting experience. Remote attendance as an option might be helpful, but to move to a primarily or fully remote event would not be nearly as vital or powerful an experience.
1019. On the other hand, it might be possible to have two or three weekend retreats that combine the elements of sessions without the time commitment so difficult for working people and families.
1020. Perhaps most important: we need to bear witness to our differences with grace and love. To promote greater engagement with the business of our community, we need people to attend and participate and feel safe in doing so. Our community has widely varied theological views and ideas on how best to act in the world, consistent with our principles. We can enlarge our spiritual views, without being diminished or diminishing others, rather than be driven toward a unitary understanding.
1021. If we sheer off the Meeting for Business into a separate event, we eliminate some of the strongest inducements for participation. We set it apart, perhaps implying that business is not for everyone. And this approach might be a way to avoid rather than address conflict. Peaceable conflict resolution should be Friends’ greatest strength.

1022. Some concern was expressed that leadership is less theologically diverse than previously.
1023. In addition, there was some feeling that many attenders and members feel disconnected from the yearly meeting and do not perceive a way to be included in active leadership roles.
1024. It seems essential to increase Friends commitment to the Yearly Meeting for a variety of reasons. We need to increase volunteer participation to make a go of any form of gathering.
1025. There is a sense that we have not heard from nominating committee about opportunities. Do members of that committee know enough about others in the yearly meeting?
1026. We need to increase donations to have a functioning office and supports for the monthly meetings.
1027. And bedrock to our principles is the manner in which our business is conducted.

Monadnock Meeting, 2 March 2025

We used the Listening Group Prompts and met in small groups to discuss them, then debriefed together.

[Prompt 1(a)]

1028. financial problem was a surprise
1029. shortening it to a weekend would be better timing
1030. very important for gathering youth because there are very few in many Meetings
1031. sessions is fun and spiritually important
1032. Let's focus on what needs to be kept: business meeting discernment, youth programs, informal conversations and social connections
1033. abolish hybrid
1034. keep hybrid for those who can't go and want to connect
1035. shorter time period would help
1036. good to have elders holding business sessions
1037. in-person time for kids is essential
1038. Junior YM is key for youth learning
1039. having delegates from MMs is helpful

[Prompt 1(b)]

1040. core question is: What is mission of YM, and how does sessions support us in achieving it?

- 1041. collective discernment is important; appreciate learning and doing it with larger group
- 1042. deeply appreciated getting to know individuals beyond my monthly meeting at sessions, and learning how each person lives into their gifts and witnesses Spirit faithfully
- 1043. never been to annual sessions and appreciate learning about it
- 1044. report back from sessions attendees each year is much appreciated
- 1045. Bible Half Hours offer new perspectives
- 1046. value Quarterly Mtg and meeting people I wouldn't otherwise have met; sessions would be an opportunity to do this with a larger group of people
- 1047. sessions provides insight into what's going on in other places, and opportunity to get to know others
- 1048. appreciate learning history of NEYM
- 1049. I'm exhausted at end of sessions; shorter time would be good

[Prompt 2]

- 1050. Quarterly Meeting provides:
 - a. personal connection which is more important than ideas we discuss
 - b. an opportunity to volunteer and help others
 - c. enjoy being with like minded souls and helping good things happen
 - d. meeting others and making personal connections is helpful
 - e. ooking together is fun
- 1051. met my partner at Friends General Conference Gathering
- 1052. Meeting Care Day workshops are opportunity to share and learn together; to build trust and share resources
- 1053. regional gatherings are useful in forming relationships, building trust and knowing who to ask for help when need arises
- 1054. Youth retreats are essential for MQM because we have few children and they need to connect with others. They have been essential for one of our youth in being affirmed while exploring sexual identity.
- 1055. Youth programming is essential for parents also

[Prompt 3]

- 1056. Have business meeting without hearing reports; people could read them ahead of time in Advance Docs. This would shorten business meeting and allow us to focus on corporate discernment and specific issues needing attention.
- 1057. Would a weekend be long enough for youth or is a week necessary? Could there be a week-long family retreat at another time? How might the cost change for housing and staffing children if we did it at another time instead of sessions?
- 1058. Could there be a week long retreat for adults at another time?

- 1059. Shorter in-person sessions could be supported by on-line sessions earlier to prepare with reports, etc.
- 1060. Could we do housing differently? Youth hostel type of multiple people in a room style?
- 1061. Could we do more work at the Quarterly Meeting level throughout the year?
- 1062. We need to be clear what the goals are for annual sessions and then reflect if we are meeting them and how to adapt.
- 1063. What part does bookstore play? Could it rotate to Quarterly Meetings?

[Prompt 4(a)]

- 1064. increase in attendance (virtual & in-person)
- 1065. happy youth; positive setting for youth
- 1066. monthly meetings are more alive spiritually and looking forward to meeting friends again in future gatherings
- 1067. in-person connections are strong with youth and adults in a fun way – singing together, contradance or a fun intergenerational activity
- 1068. good unprogrammed time and spaces – meals, and maybe late night hangout times
- 1069. keep interest group activities

[Prompt 4(b)]

- 1070. coffee house
- 1071. overnight hospitality
- 1072. need for verbal reports when written reports could be read ahead of time

[Prompt 5]

- 1073. underneath the words we heard that we all care about sessions and NEYM
- 1074. There is general unity about a long weekend being a more doable time frame, or a weekend that includes a Monday holiday, would be best for adults. This is related to holding regular jobs, and available energy.
- 1075. We also heard that doing prep (reading the advance documents and hearing reports virtually would allow our in-person time to focus on discernment in business meeting; this could possibly allow for in-person to be a long weekend.
- 1076. We also heard that youth programming is essential; we respect the staffing challenges and recognize that longer would be nice if possible for the youth.
- 1077. We did not have clarity about youth solutions.
- 1078. We are listening, looking forward to hearing from others, and willing to adapt to the wisdom of a larger group.

[Prompt 6]

1079. Joy in considering a viable shorter time together in-person.
1080. This conversation inspires me to attend sessions having learned more about it. ++
1081. Realize our need to share our enthusiasm and recognize personal need to be financially responsible for YM
1082. Want to be sure to report back after sessions 2025, debrief and share.
1083. Good to look behind the scenes and recognize that we need to change the system so it can meet the needs of a changing culture
1084. We need in-person discernment annually as a yearly meeting; we look to YM to know our future and hope together.
1085. We're glad that others are figuring this (annual sessions visioning) out and have good ideas.
1086. We celebrate our acceptance of need for change and willingness to discover a new way together.
1087. We recognize the importance of YM sessions and want it to continue.

Northampton Friends Meeting (Second Listening Session), March 23, 2025

[Prompt 1(b)]

1088. Hasn't been in YM for >10 years in person. Worked with the kids' program for lots of years, working with the youngest group. Main impetus to come aftering reading the background materials is the incredible importance of the program for the children, from the youngest all the way up.
1089. Very impressed (20 years ago) with the dedication and knowledge of the people running the junior YM (and the rest of it).
1090. Valued contact with the wider NE community, particularly ones working in anti-racism area.
1091. One thing struck her at YM, not enough time for spirit-led discernment. Sometimes clear that there was one voice that was left out.
1092. Was very involved for 10 years and at Sessions a lot, but that was because I was on M&C, a wonderful experience for getting to know people outside my monthly meeting. Too many people I've run into who have no involvement with any other quakers outside their monthly meetings. That lets them think their meeting is the only way. M&C: let me meet stellar people, like Jan Hoffman.
1093. For me and family, the children's program really important. Wonderful for parents to know their kids were getting that kind of experience without having to be on top of them all the time. Helpful for kids coming from a small meetings to know other Quaker kids.

- 1094. Also on YM M&C, watched Jan Hoffman clerk that committee.
- 1095. When much younger, volunteered with youth program and then with kids.
- 1096. Concern for how programs for young people go forward had me here.
- 1097. size of the cost! No idea it cost that much.
- 1098. impressed with thoughtfulness that went into the background materials.
Emphasis on looking at bigger structural picture is good, better than the event planning meeting she thought this was.
- 1099. Very proud of Nia, to have the experience and wisdom to do what she does.

Magic wand:

- 1100. Magic wand: more dedicated volunteers for youth programming to continue.
It's the making of the new Quakers.
- 1101. More participation from the larger YM so less falls on staff and would engage more people. More money.
- 1102. Would also wish for more spacious time. Either less business or business done in other ways so not so focused at that one time. Time to allow people to be together.
- 1103. YM staff can calm down; don't try to be everything. I
- 1104. t's gotten bigger than it need be. Business can be done throughout the year.
Keep the children's program and gather people together without business, that's enough.
- 1105. For both youth and children's program and adult business discernment, I would create a container for those to happen without much staff time or angst about the details. A place and a set-up such that YM and QMs could just comfortably be right there.

[Prompt 2]

- 1106. Recent discernment discovery day was great. The meta-focus on the topic; topic-focused. Rich sharing.
- 1107. Having the chance to meet folks from other meetings
- 1108. Working with archives and records has benefited the meeting. Also Puente de Amigos gave me and others in our meeting to make visits to Cuba; overlapping with archives function.
- 1109. One thing I hear about is JYM and YAF have a lot of spark. There are parents whose kids never come to meeting but are faithful about their gatherings. That feels like an exciting thing; maybe a model for the rest of us to look at.

1110. The best scenario would be being with people throughout the YM working, socializing, and it occurs to me that the children's programs are carried throughout the year by the retreats, and the annual gathering maybe doesn't need to do that, because currently it takes huge numbers of people to carry it. Strength of the youth programming gets carried on at the retreats.
1111. The thing that has the most life for me is our midweek worship. That format works so well and connects us so deeply. The socializing afterward is also very rich. So valuable. Zoom doesn't have to mean dead. If over 25 or 30 on zoom, that's as much as you can do.
1112. What's always had life in gatherings beyond monthly meeting is meeting with friends in the wider YM.
1113. I get a great deal of energy, contentment, awe from a well-run business meeting so Sessions that are meetings for worship for business are well run, that's a joy. When discernment and business comes from the worship. That's always my hope. But it doesn't often happen.

[Prompt 3]

1114. "flexible formats" post-COVID in our monthly meetings: can we find similar structures for intervisitation, regional meetings, and our annual sessions?
1115. One-day workshops sound promising.
1116. Of the options presented, families on sight and adult stuff happening by zoom.
1117. For kids, it's really important that they be in person.
1118. "getting to know people outside of the monthly meeting": other ways to foster this?
1119. Maybe quarterly meetings linked somehow by Zoom. Let QM have more importance. They don't have anything to do so they become proforma.
1120. Gatherings at the quarterly levels.
1121. Use Zoom more, especially if we figure out the right ways to do it.
1122. Like the idea of quarterly regional gatherings. Meet in person with less carbon footprint. It may work for children and youth, as well as adults.
1123. I think of extended weekend, instead of five days, for YM.
1124. Also like the Quarters having a bigger emphasis.
1125. Found it discouraging that most of the alternatives were full of negatives.
1126. Maybe YM is just business overnight, with a different gathering that is just for fun and learning.
1127. If the YM is burdened, pass the business down to the Quarters.

1128. Is there a way to change the order that business comes to it. Maybe it would have more YM business aspects to it. Thinking of ways QM could strengthen its youth and young adult programmings, not by having youth retreats with QM cuz kids want to have time separate from adults. QM as mini-yearly meetings with more in person business. Annual QM retreat. Is there a way to make that bigger, more family-oriented than it is?
1129. That YM be everything for everyone could be something that's laid down.

[Prompt 4]

1130. participation would be a good indicator.
1131. Held lightly or let go of, the workshops and peripheral sessions that could happen regionally or on-line.
1132. Participation and reaction of the people
1133. Same
1134. Ditto
1135. Participation and expressions of interest
1136. Yes to participation.

[Prompt 5]

1137. Unity on value of kids programming, but disunity on how to carry out: yes at Sessions, no, not at Sessions. Business only at Sessions, business outside of sessions (maybe carried on in quarters)
1138. Status quo is not sustainable; other options are not great; sense that we need to rethink things.
1139. Unity on the value of intervisitation (YM, committees). Value of the larger
1140. Have QM mean more
1141. Importance of youth ministry. Should definitely not be let go or ignored.
1142. Importance of youth ministry. Ask how best it can be done, as opposed to how does it relate to YM. What makes sense for IT.
1143. I like the idea of Quarters carrying more weight. Step back and ask what's important and what are the ways we can do them.
1144. More attention to spirit and less to the details.
1145. heard we are in unity re importance of youth ministry. Number of shapes that it takes. Perhaps those can be re-examined. What worked best and when it works best.

1146. I've heard unity of strengthening the QMs, giving them more life and business. In part to take burden off YM.
1147. Workshops for adults can be held at different sites throughout the year, at FGC. Sessions need not try to be an FGC conference.
1148. Everything that is done is valuable, but they do not all need to be happening at the same time.
- a. That feels like an underlying unity under the underlying unity
1149. Zoom or in person? Yes, both.

[Prompt 6]

1150. Need to be thinking of something that is representative. Meetings appoint someone or a few people to be there. Without M&C, there is no representative body. At most meetings M&C is a key committee. There ought to be a Quarterly Meeting M&C. That's got to be picked up. That's a group that has a finger on the pulse. It could strengthen the quarters.
1151. There's no religious education committee. Nia is doing it. It's what M&C used to do. It's passed entirely to staff. That's a lack. Nowhere to take Elements of Quakerism class for guidance or support. A Religious Ed Committee could do some of the workshop sessions that were offered at Sessions. Could be on Zoom.
1152. Smaller gatherings than YM meetings could be topical, social issues, rather than making them all on the basis of geography. Religious Education and M&C are two of those.
1153. This feels like an inflection point for the YM; the YM has survived and gotten through it before, so I'm hopeful. I feel hopeful; see some clarity among us. One other hope is that there is a soft-serve ice cream machine that is freely available.
1154. Having this process makes me feel hopeful.
1155. Sense that we are looking at a grassroots movement, vs. top-down. And maybe we as a meeting can infuse some of that grass-roots energy.
1156. What does this mean for the YM office and functions. What will the structures look like? There will be changes.
1157. We need to remember that we are the YM, not leave it to the staff. It's us.

Parents' Sessions, March 30, 2025

[Prompt 1]

1158. Sessions provides a communal, intergenerational experience; it brings families together in our pressurized lives.

1159. Attending as a family is different. The focus of sessions is a “non-kid” event, but it’s great for kids to see adults doing discernment around life as a Quaker. Kids watch adults talking to each other, and can occasionally participate or ask questions. The adults and kids aren’t segregated, with the larger purpose being to model Quaker testimonies, and adults working together in action.
1160. Kids’ experiences in junior yearly meeting (JYM) are full and rich, and are carried into intergenerational worship and other times together such as meals or time together in the family dorms. Sessions creates space for these interactions, and these interactions are meaningful for our future.
1161. Online daily Quaker meeting during COVID was an important part of getting through the pandemic and staying connected. Many families, including parents, kids and grandparents, participated. These daily opportunities helped let children know they were safe, and offered contemplative time together around the testimonies, weaving in and around Friends during COVID.
1162. Fond memories of singing songs learned at sessions on the car ride home. Opportunities for “what did you do today” discussions in the family village in the evenings. Attending sessions supports rites of passage as children grow up, and changing/growing family roles. It’s stressful raising children, and sessions provides a lens for watching kids grow up.

[Prompt 3]

1163. Getting families together requires being in-person. On-line is not as accessible, and you miss the in-between interactions that make sessions so rich.
1164. The every-other-year option would be challenging for children to maintain regular connections. Too fragmented, and too much developmental change over a two-year span.
1165. A shorter in-person event might work, and partnering annual sessions with JYM retreats might be an option. Shorter in-person events might not allow enough time for business to be conducted. Perhaps need to find a way to conduct business throughout the year. Other yearly meetings spend less time doing business. Focus on and allow time for the community aspects of a shorter, in-person gathering.
1166. Regional events might work, but need to make sure there’s a sufficient number of youth participating to run a robust program. It’s important to have the intergenerational component. Is it possible to have critical mass on a regional basis?
1167. Youth retreats and family retreats help families stay connected. Find ways to tap into regional/quarterly gatherings, which could absorb some of the need. It was noted there is a difference between offering childcare, and offering child program and intergenerational activities. What held us together in the past?

How can we bring out the unpredictable/experimental side of sessions and adult interactions in front of our children?

1168. Maybe need to lay down business to allow time to be together. There are other opportunities such as work days at camps or schools, which provide spirit-led action.

[Prompt 4]

1169. Numbers of participants will let us know if we're moving in the right direction. Children making and keeping connections through the various life stages. We want to be assured that Quakers aren't dying out; that there are still Quaker numbers and vitality.
1170. Is there a good way to reach out to those who haven't been able to participate in the listening sessions to find out what has life for them, or what might be a waste of time? Is this the most accessible way to reach people with busy family lives? How do we reach those who grew up going to sessions, but no longer attend, and ask them why?
1171. Expand ways for parents to take on roles at sessions, and perhaps find ways for kids to take on roles, also.

[Prompt 5]

1172. There was unity around the desire for in-person, multigenerational ways to come together in community; to conduct business, model Quaker values, and create life-long connections.
1173. It's important for these opportunities to occur at least once a year.
1174. They could be shorter in length, and/or more regionally-based as long as there's a sufficient number of participants, and good programming options specifically geared towards youth and families.

[Prompt 6]

1175. Those participating were grateful for the opportunity to share deeply with regards to NEYM Sessions, and finding ways to continue inviting each other into our shared sacred journey.

Discernment Discovery Day small group

[Prompt 1]

How did things happen before there were college campuses

- 1176. delegates—small numbers gathered at meeting houses they trusted in the delegates to represent local meetings
- 1177. The overall structure had a robust existence of traveling. Ministers meetings had connections other than Sessions
- 1178. there were closer relationships between meetings, including early printing and distribution of texts.
- 1179. There were many different options back then: people would stay at other people's homes. Could we do that now in the Boston area on university campuses
- 1180. people who volunteer don't pay, the New England yearly meeting pays for them
- 1181. there are increased costs in the last few years when many people come to Sessions over all the cost
- 1182. decrease recently: not as many people are coming to Sessions as in the past
- 1183. smaller colleges that would suit sessions aren't available when we search for them

Experiences of Sessions attendees

- 1184. go to meet people
- 1185. Maybe they only go once in a decade
- 1186. maybe they won't go at all
- 1187. if it's virtual they're not going for discernment it seems like they're going for community
- 1188. Sessions can meet people on a deeper spiritual connection but for families maybe that's not the best option
- 1189. Can we build something that could house a general yearly meeting? We spoke of New Bedford and their capacity but for breakout rooms
- 1190. the biggest thing about Sessions is inter-generational worship
- 1191. the presence of us on site seems important for discernment.
- 1192. We talked about Friends Camp and meeting houses. They're not equipped for the needs of an older population.

[Prompt 2?] What do we need to do at Sessions? What needs to get done?

- 1193. in Amherst people can commute; it's more centrally located.
- 1194. One friend mentioned his three and six year old children: seeing them seeing older kids and adults has intergenerational input that's important for his family both for the kids and for the adults.
- 1195. When the yearly meeting was representational to facilitate marrying outside the meeting that was also important
- 1196. FGC is only a social gathering now it started as a social gathering to meet other Quakers to marry.

1197. For intervisitation neym.org that doesn't happen anymore.

[Prompt 3]

1198. One option might be to gather every other year or every three years but business seems to need to happen every year
1199. if it were every other year, we would need something to bridge that next year
1200. representative yearly meeting seems exclusionary
1201. the delegate model allows others to attend so it's not so exclusionary.
1202. We trust that the treasurer in our own meetings would come to us if there was an answer.
1203. the work to discern the business of the yearly meeting is different now than it has been in the permanent board.
1204. Perhaps we can expand the delegate model, but only the delegates are decision makers and approved
1205. in New England leaders now have more autonomy to act than they did in the past.
1206. Another suggestion was to have two events, a social one and one for the purpose of business. Maybe one of these could be hosted at a local meeting house
1207. junior high, young friends and young friends going from programming to complete freedom can also be disorienting so two meetings one for social and one for business might help with that.

[Prompt 5]

1208. We were reminded after this discussion that we can't be all things to all people
1209. it's difficult to get a number of volunteers for Sessions.
1210. We wonder if it's possible to sustain this.

Addendum to Monadnock

1211. It was much appreciated that because we work collectively as a yearly meeting, we have a voice outside that can make a difference. The example given was deciding several years ago to allow the Presiding Clerk and Secretary to respond publicly in a timely manner. This made it possible for the prompt response to filing the recent lawsuit.

The following notes were received after the deadline and as a result were not included in the summary compiled for Visioning Day.

Option 1: limited housing option

1212. Unless a lot of work is done to help organize housing with local friends (and it's held in an area with a heck-of-lot of willing hosts) this may, practically speaking, result in NEYM still calling it "Pay as Led" while actually putting people in charge of their own expenses, resulting in lower income people being much less likely to attend.

1213. If that work of helping people find food and housing was done, it could lead to some really cool deeper connections. But it seems like a lot, very complex.

Option 2: Only families on site

1214. This may make it less likely that kids would be able to connect with youth programs or other kids remotely.

1215. It feels like it would intensify separateness between the "parts" of NEYM.

1216. More of a disconnect between Business and fun, youth and older people, parents and non-parents, etc.

Option 3: Entirely virtually

1217. As our family is joining entirely virtually anyway, this would not be a big change for us, though we do care about the experience of in-person attenders, and also get some vicarious enjoyment from seeing Friends experiencing campus.

1218. We hope very much that NEYM would go to the work to make youth programs and multigenerational experiences happen in a virtual setting. The youngest member of our group expressed disbelief and horror at the notion that NEYM might even consider not doing youth programs during Sessions. Our experience tells us that there is much greater potential for all types of social connection online than the "pros and cons" page on this option implies. In various settings--some NEYM or Quaker related and others not--we've experienced Zoom-based group events including: dancing, singing in community, talent shows, poetry readings, play reading (Shakespeare and others), musical strum-alongs, online theater, writers groups, art groups, pet socials (where everyone gets to meet each others pets and learn about them), 12 step meetings, game times with games ranging from hide and seek to telephone pictionary to musical trivia and everything in between, cool ice-breaker questions, group drawing exercises, playing video games with friends, laughter yoga, picture book sharing, large and small family birthday parties, Dungeons and Dragons groups, chess tournaments, Worship events of many types, and different versions of

informal "coffee klatch" visiting times that have gone in all sorts of different directions.

1219. Youth connect online in so many ways already, there are many reasons to think they would be able and willing to do this--and maybe help lead the way.

1220. And if we are planning a long-term switch to online meetings for NEYM Friends to conduct business, it makes no sense not to create a way into this type of Quaker gathering for our young people.

1221. If Sessions were to go all virtual, whether every year or every other year, all members of our family might be very interested in joining the planning committee. We have many ideas.

Option 4: Regional Networks

1222. To all four of us, this seems complex to the point of being completely unworkable. Hybrid Meeting for Business already poses challenges that NEYM is still working out--for clerking, tech management, basically, people being heard and seen and being able to find the sense of the meeting. NEYM has been so committed to making hybrid work and is getting better and better at it, but this would multiply the issues by many times.

Option 5: Shorter on-site

1223. Opposed to putting even more responsibility on the Permanent Board.

Worried this would encourage that, changing the balance towards more of the work of discernment being done by the Permanent Board separately from the body of Friends at Sessions.

1224. People might not want to travel a long way for a quick turn-around.

1225. Sessions already feels like it goes so quickly.

1226. Hard to figure what should be left out to make the shorter time suffice. For instance, one of us suggested that the Coffeehouse was something that could be done separately at a different time of year, the other three responded very strongly that no, it couldn't, its whole energy and purpose is based on it's being a culmination of people's experience at Sessions and how they'd gotten to know each other, and become brave enough to share things.

Option 6: In person every other year

1227. It sounds like this may not really solve the current problems that Sessions is having. The planning could be cumbersome and complex.

1228. But we can see many positives in it, provided that the "Zoom years" are given proper attention and can serve as a connecting point between the in-person(hybrid) Sessions, for Friends of all ages. (See comments on option 3 for more on our family's thoughts on this.)

1229. It might possibly be easier to draw youth into an online Sessions if there were the opportunities for them to gather physically every other year, so that they would be visiting with Friends they had gotten to know on a campus or other physical location.

1230. Likewise, the opportunity for youth and families to meet online and experience part or all of Sessions virtually first without the pressure of committing to something involving travel, expense, and being away from home, might draw new people to try it out who might later come to an in-person Sessions once they have the reassurance of knowing they have connected with the people involved. (This actually happened for several families in 2020.)

Demographic questions for our family:

a. How many people participated in this Listening Session? 4

b. Were there Friends present in the group who have attended NEYM Annual Sessions?
Yes

c. Were there Friends present in the group who have attended NEYM Annual Sessions in the past three years? Yes

d. Were there Friends present in the group who have never attended NEYM's Annual Sessions? No

e. Were there Friends in the group who have been part of youth programs at Sessions as a participant or volunteer? Yes

f. Were there Friends in the group who have attended another Yearly Meeting's Sessions or the Friends General Conference Gathering? No

g. Were there Friends in your group who are currently under 19 years of age? Yes, 2

h. Were there Friends in your group between the ages of 19–39 years? No

i. Were there Friends in your group between the ages of 40–65 years? Yes, 1

j. Were there Friends in your group ages 66 and older? Yes, 1

k. Were there Friends in your group who are currently parenting children or teens?
Yes, 2