

Information for First Time Attenders

Orientation of those coming to Yearly Meeting for the first time

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

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

Purpose of Yearly Meeting Sessions: worship, business, and fellowship.

WORSHIP:

It can be a somewhat different experience from our home meetings. We hear new voices. There are many worship opportunities, programmed and unprogrammed: early morning worship, First Day worship, mid-week worship, brief periods of worship following scheduled speakers and during business meeting, as well as worship in smaller groups offered as part of our new Afternoon Opportunities.

BUSINESS:

We hear reports from committees which have business to present, including the Finance Committee (the budget), the Permanent Board (decisions made during the past year and recommendations for Sessions), Ministry & Counsel (the State of the Society), the Nominating Committee (nominations of officers and committee members for the next year), etc.

Business sessions are under the care of our clerks: the Presiding Clerk, two Recording Clerks and two Reading Clerks. The clerks are recommended by the Permanent Board and appointed by the Yearly Meeting. Incoming Clerks take office at the close of Sessions and serve through the subsequent year.

Standing committees and quarterly meetings can bring items forward for consideration, or the Yearly Meeting may have requested in a previous session that a matter come up again for further discernment. Other business matters include writing epistles (letters of greeting to the wider Quaker world), hearing memorial minutes, and reports from our staff.

Meetings are asked to appoint up to five **representatives** to assure wide representation in the meetings for business where decisions are made. If you are one of your meeting's representatives, please find out where to sign in.

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

SESSIONS IS ALSO A RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE

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

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

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

Program activities include Bible Half-Hour, Community Plenary, Anchor Groups, afternoon and evening "opportunities" and committee meetings. The Sessions program is planned by the Sessions Committee, beginning the previous fall with careful consideration of evaluation comments and suggestions submitted by those attending the Sessions.

Committees meet to organize, introduce new members, and plan ahead for next year. Membership on committees is at the invitation of the Nominating Committee and confirmed by the Yearly Meeting in session. The Nominating Committee welcomes suggestions of people who may be interested in serving on one of our committees.

Bible Half Hour: Each year someone is invited to give a series of half-hour talks based on Biblical themes and references; this year it takes place Sunday through Thursday at 8:30 a.m.

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

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

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